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ANNA LISLE

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ANNA LISLE
(ANNABELLA CRAWFORD),
AUTHOR OF "SELF AND SELF-SACRIFICE;" "QUICKSANDS;" ETC.

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WINNIE TRAVERS.

PART I.

ONE of our good old nurse's wise sayings, was this: "The mother of mischief is no bigger than a midge's wing."

Looking back upon the past, it appears to me utterly inconceivable that I, though then a mere child, could have so magnified little grievances, that, in trying to escape them, I rushed into a step, the consequences of which have followed me through life.

As often as I recall those few months, when my darling Ben and I were alone together, a full tide of remorseful bitterness sweeps over my heart,—a longing to have again in my power the choice that was mine on that sweet Summer night, when I turned my back upon my one chance of happiness, and, blinded by my headlong pride and selfishness, refused to heed the voice of my better angel, my brother, my little Ben.

Though Time has rolled on since then, the whole is as vividly before me as though it had happened but a month ago. I can recall scenes, words, even the smallest trifles, without an effort. That time is too well remembered, ever to pass away.

CHAPTER I.

YOU have often wanted to know how it all began. I will tell you.

The beginning was on one very hot summer day, the very hottest I can remember in all my life. The air was heavy with sultry heat; the flowers drooped and fainted. One saw everything through a sort of hot, misty, shimmer. Even the birds seemed oppressed by the unwonted heat, and, betaking themselves to the deepest shade, almost ceased their song. Insect life alone was active and stirring: the gnats and midges floated in little clouds, and seemed to fill the air.

Ben and I lay buried in the moss and ferns and nodding grasses of the wood, trying to cool ourselves, and failing miserably. I was in a state of boiling, bubbling fury; and Ben's anger, though modified, was quite enough to keep him warm.

The cause of our wrath was this; that whereas we two undeserving pickles had hitherto reigned supreme in the household, we had now some idea that our father contemplated a second marriage; for so said our doting old nurse, who, with many "Oh's" and "Ah's," and "poor dears," told us what she and the other servants suspected, and added, that if it was really true, they all meant to warn, and that only she (and she hoped, Miss Parsons) would stay on, out of love to us. "I'm afraid it's true, you poor dear lambs," she sighed; "else why does your papa keep going away so often—twice a week or more? And why is he always looking out for the letter-bag? And why does he post some of his letters himself, instead of sending them by the boy! Ah! it's a bad job, depend upon it!" And nurse shook her head ominously.

We had received this shock that afternoon, and had gone off to the wood, to discuss our plan of opposition.

"Of course," said I, "Father will give in, when he finds we are firm; for we must be firm, Ben,—mind that! I can trust myself, but I am rather afraid of you."

Ben vowed to be firm as any fifty rocks.

"We won't be too hard upon him you know, Ben; we will

forgive him as soon as he promises never to see the horrid woman again."

—"Nor to write to her, Winnie," put in Ben.

"Quite right, Ben; very sensible of you! Now, hadn't we better go to Father at once, and let him have our ultimatum. —I think that's the right word, eh? It would never do to make a blunder when we want to be impressive."

"And Winnie, we must tell him that we see through his motive for wanting to send us to school. The idea! When Miss Parsons has been teaching us for so many years. I am sure *you* must be quite enough educated for anything."

"It was because I spelt 'scissors' 'sizars,' Ben; but I daresay nine people out of ten would do the same, without all this fuss being made about it."

"I have heard that spelling is a gift, Winnie dear; and that, not to be able to spell, is no proof of being uneducated."

"I thought, Ben, it was all that old cat Jezebel's doing; but *now* I see it was from quite a different motive, and so I shall tell father."

"Suppose Father's crusty, Winnie?" urged Ben, with ill-concealed reluctance for the proposed interview.

"Oh, he never could be, with us! Haven't we always got our own way?"

"Still"——urged Ben;—

"Ben, if you're afraid, I'll go alone!"

"No, Winnie darling, that you shan't. I'm not a bit afraid."

"Then let's go now, Ben, before we change our minds!"

We found our father in his study, not, as usual, deep in his beloved books, but seated before the window, with an open letter in his hand. Our dear father! How we loved him! And yet we had come here, fully bent on opposition. He turned as we entered, and the dear kindly smile with which he, as usual, greeted us, made me answer in rather faltering tones to his "Well, dears?"

"Father, we have come to — to — say something."

And then I stuck fast; but I gave Bennie a little "dudge," as a signal that he was to take up the parable.

—"To say, Father——to ask——at least, I mean, to—— Winnie will tell you," stammered the recreant Ben, his courage failing him at the last.

"What is it, darlings?" asked our father, with the same kind smile.

Indignant at Ben's defalcation, I said, "We want to say, Papa, that we won't go to school!"

This was a middle course; the question of the marriage was to be an after consideration, and would doubtless occur at a later stage of conversation.

"Not go to school, Winnie?"

"No, Papa, we think Miss Parsons quite as good as any schoolmistress; and she has taught us for years and years, and if we don't know enough from her teaching, it's not likely we shall learn more from a snuffy old schoolmistress."

"My dear Winnie, this is arrant nonsense," said our father, with an amused expression. "As if a little girl like you, could possibly be a judge. Your Aunt Jemima says that you are utterly and lamentably deficient in education and manners; and I fear"—

"Bother Aunt Jemima!" was my irreverent rejoinder. "She's a spiteful old cat!"

"Now Winnie, Winnie"—remonstrated our father.

"Yes, Father, and a humbug. She is always talking about 'the Lord;' and people who are always talking about 'the Lord,' are humbugs. I'm sure the Lord doesn't like it, and Aunt Jemima has no business to talk in that way. It is too familiar, I think."

"My dear child!"

"Well, Papa, it does so provoke me to hear her talk that sort of cant and twaddle. God is so much above us all." In my great indignation against poor Aunt Jemima, I was forgetting the purpose of our interview; but I harked back. "So, Father, it is decided that we are not to go to school?"

"Not at all, Winnie," responded our father, with, for him, an astonishing amount of decision; "it is decided that you *are* to go to school."

Ben and I stared at each other in mute surprise. At last, indignation gaining the mastery over astonishment, up spake I.

"Why don't you speak out, and be honest, Father? You have a *reason* for wanting to get rid of us! You are going to marry a horrid designing woman—to set a step-mother over us, who will make our lives a misery"—(quoting from nurse). Here I stopped, almost choking with excitement.

"Winnie!" from Father, in a tone that ought to have crushed me to the earth, it was so full of grief and pain. "Winnie! this from you!"

I heard a sound of sobbing behind me, and Ben pleading, "Oh Winnie, don't! don't! Poor Father!"

"Ben, you're a fool!"

But it was all I could do to keep from crying myself. I longed to fling my arms round our dear father's neck, and tell him how I loved him, and hated myself.

Silence ensued. It was a crisis. Each of us instinctively dreaded making the first move. I felt as if the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece, were counting out the moments that still remained before we should openly defy our father. How loud it was! how aggravating!

Then he spoke. "Children, I am sorry this has happened. Sorry? I am pained more than you can understand. You are so young, poor little things!" He paused, as though he, too, dreaded what was to come.

"Dear Winnie, and my little Ben,"—

Ben rushed forward, and, throwing his arms round Father's neck, held him tight.

"Dears, you are quite right in thinking that I am about to marry, but not in saying that the lady is 'designing,' or that she will be a harsh mother to you. There was no necessity for me to tell you anything about it till something was decided. This letter *has* decided it."

"Papa! Papa! Papa! Don't marry! We will be good children, indeed we will! But oh! don't marry! Don't! don't!" And I fell at his feet, and clasped his knees, crying piteously.

"Why, my little Winnie, you are unreasonable," he soothingly remonstrated, drawing me to his knee. "Listen dear."

And he spoke so reasonably, so patiently, so convincingly, that we must have been little fiends, to hold out still.

"Winnie darling, when your mother died, twelve years ago, you were a little helpless child, and your brother, whom we named 'Benjamin' because he was the youngest and last, was still more helpless. I thought it would be a good thing to ask your Aunt Jemima to keep the house, and attend to your bringing up. She, as you know, was my step-sister, and some years my senior, and had been an excellent manager in my father's house, keeping everything in perfect order." (Ben and I exchanged looks, which meant, that Aunt Jemima had kept our poor father in "perfect order" too.) "So Aunt Jemima came here."

Our father paused, and then, with manifest reluctance, continued: "Now children, Aunt Jemima is an excellent woman!"

We both burst into an explosion of laughter. Our father tried to look grieved, but failed signally. The corners of his mouth relaxed. "Children, you should not laugh at Aunt Jemima. She *is* an excellent woman, but she is not suited to this house, nor is the house suited to her."

"Send her away, Father!" "Pack her off!" This was shouted in a breath, by both.

Our father appeared not to notice our kindly suggestion. He resumed: "Therefore, a change must be made, my dears, and I hope it will be welcome to all. Aunt Jemima would not stay in the house except as its head. If another take the head of authority, Aunt Jemima will leave."

Oh! the dear, cunning old father, to tempt us with such a bait! To get rid of "old Jemmy!" Blissful thought! For one moment I wavered, and was disposed to re-consider the matter; but then I remembered the "Seven devils more wicked than before," and I determined to accept no compromise. So I replied: "No, Father; you know it is said, 'Of two evils, choose the least.'"

"My dear, the *less* would be better English," put in father.

"Oh! what does it matter, so long as you know what I mean, dear? If you can't get rid of Aunt Jemima in any other way than—— than *that*, she must stay; it can't be helped."

Again there was a silence; it was broken by our father.

"But Winnie, you don't know how lonely my life is. Your aunt is no companion for me; on the contrary, we differ on almost every subject. Then, the bickerings and dissensions between her and you, make my life miserable."

"Papa, we won't bicker and dissent any more, if only you won't marry," pleaded little Ben.

Again a pause. Then our father spoke decidedly.

"Children, I have pleaded with you as few fathers would have done. I have nothing more to say, except that I have thought well over the matter, the lady has consented to become my wife, and I intend to marry."

"Then Papa, we won't stay here!" was my passionate, despairing cry; and we both rushed headlong from the house

and into the garden, and both bewailed our fate in wild and tearful invective.

Little Ben spoke. "Don't cry, Winnie darling; perhaps Father will change his mind."

"No Ben—No-o-o," I sobbed. "He wo-o-n't! He wo-o-n't! O-O-h!" My grief was so infectious, that Bennie also gave way, and we howled till we howled ourselves out. Not for the life of me could I have squeezed another tear out of my eyes.

"I feel better now, Ben," said I, blowing my nose vigorously. "How do you feel?"

"I'm better, too," said Ben.

"Ben, what do you advise?"

"Well dear, as you are sure Father won't give in, I suppose *we* must; don't you think so?"

"What!" I exclaimed, in shrill indignation. "Oh Ben! I didn't think you were so mean-spirited!"

Poor Ben coloured painfully. "It's only that you asked me to advise, Winnie. I'll do whatever you think best."

"Well Ben, I thought, as you had seen a little more of the world than I, having been at school for twelve months, you might be able to suggest a remedy."

"No, Winnie, I don't think I saw much of the world when I was at school. I only learnt to fight, and to talk in a more manly way than girls."

Poor little Ben! He had learnt a good deal of school slang, and had come home to ventilate it. It appeared to me so charming, so altogether different from the style of Aunt Jemmy and Miss Parsons, that I had forthwith adopted it, to such an extent, that Aunt Jemima represented to our father that "since Ben had gone to school, Winnie had grown like a boy;" whereupon our poor father, instead of arranging, as old Jemmy hoped, for Ben's remaining at school during the holidays, decreed that he should stay at home altogether. So, in order that I should not grow like a boy, poor Ben was in a fair way to grow like a girl. However, we rejoiced exceedingly in the consequences of Aunt Jem's remonstrance, and resolved that any future attempt to send Ben to school should result in awful language on my part.

"Ben," said I, after a long pause, "I have it!"

"What?" asked Ben.

"Let us emigrate!"

"We? Why Winnie, we are only children! What would become of us?"

"Oh! we should do well, Ben! *I* am not a young child, at all events. We will scrape together all our savings. I haven't turned out my money-box for ever so long, and there are all my Christmas-boxes, and birthday presents, and pocket-money. I have always thought, what *did* we want with pocket-money, when everything was bought for us; but now, how useful it will be!"

"Yes Winnie; and how fortunate that we have rich relations living at a distance, who send us five pound notes instead of presents, because they don't know what we would like to have."

"Yes indeed, Ben. Let me see"—counting on my fingers—"Last Christmas, five pounds from Aunt Catherine, five pounds from Aunt Janet—(Funny! that they won't come to see us, and won't let us go and see them, but send us presents all the same, isn't it?)—ten pounds from Uncle Dick. Then my birthday—five pounds more. How much is that? Why, twenty-five pounds. A *great* sum, Ben!"

"I," said Ben, "have my Christmas presents, but my birthday has not yet come, you know. Then, there is my pocket-money—ever so much."

"Ben, let us instantly go and break open our money-boxes."

And so we did, and found that we could muster between us the splendid sum of £60, which seemed to us perfectly inexhaustible.

"Nurse," said I, to that too partial adherent of ours, "do you ever hear from Nancy, now?"

Nancy was her married daughter, who had emigrated to Australia two years ago.

"Yes, my dear, and she's well and happy."

"Does she like Australia as well as England?"

"Oh no! She says there's nothing like the old country. She likes its ways better than the rough ways of them out there."

"Why doesn't she come back if she doesn't like it?"

"Because it took a deal of money to get there, and it would take too much to come back; a deal of money!"

"Was it comfortable on board the ship, nurse? Do they give each person a nice bed-room and sitting-room?"

"Bless you no, dear! Why, there's ever so many huddled together all of a heap, and they've got to put up with it as they can."

"Oh Ben, how dreadful that must be!" I exclaimed. "I am sure *we* should not like that."

"Dear heart, no!" exclaimed nurse; "it's bad enough for poor working people, but ladies and gentlemen could never abide it."

So our idea of emigrating was nipped in the bud; not so our resolve to defy aggression.

The afternoon passed away. Dinner time came; we dined at seven. Father gave his arm to Miss Parsons, and to Aunt Jemima to conduct her to the head of the table. Ben and I followed, walking mincingly on the tips of our toes, and screwing in our shoulders, in derisive imitation of our aunt. She no doubt heard our ill-bred and but half-suppressed chuckles of laughter, and divined that they were indulged in, on her account. Had she turned round suddenly she would inevitably have caught us in the act of dropping a sweeping curtsey and low bow, also in derision. However, that she must have guessed at a part of what was going on, we knew by the grace that prefaced the meal. Aunt Jem always said grace, and when we had offended her, invariably seasoned it with little ebullitions of wrath and spite, delicious to our souls. This was Aunt Jem's grace on this occasion: "We pray that this meal may be blessed to all here assembled, that all wrath, hatred, clamour, and ill-breeding may be banished from this board. Amen." While this little Jeremiad was in course of delivery, poor Ben, trying to be good, had studiously avoided meeting my eyes, and had kept his firmly riveted to the table-cloth. A slight cough from me caused him, however, to look up. An explosion of laughter from both of us was the result, and followed as close upon the "Amen," and with much the same effect, as a crackling peal of thunder upon a vivid flash of lightning. Father looked up, and was no doubt about to reprove us, when Aunt Jem took up the cudgels herself.

"Winifred," demanded she, in icy tones, "Have you ever heard what most resembles the 'crackling of thorns under a pot'?"

"No, never, Aunt Jemima," I replied, with an innocent look. "It is a conundrum, I suppose?"

"The laughter of fools!" she said, with a strong emphasis on the last word.

"The laughter of fools? I don't see it, Aunt Jemima.

How stupid I am at conundrums! Please to explain what it means; I think old Pinchley likes conundrums, and if I knew the meaning of that one, I would ask him."

Aunt Jem looked vinegar cruets. She had a lurking kindness for the Curate, and we knew it.

"Ben," I continued, "I was reading the Proverbs this morning, and came to that verse, 'A continual dropping in a very rainy day, and a contentious woman are alike;' and I couldn't make out what it meant. Does it mean that both are so stupid and boring and wearisome? I must ask old Pinchley."

At this crisis I became suddenly aware that our father's eyes were fixed upon me in stern displeasure. I turned scarlet; I could not bear that look from him. Struggling against my tears, I bolted morsel after morsel in silence. But Aunt Jemima would not drop the cudgels; she soon resumed.

"I think it highly improper, Winifred, that you should speak of sacred things in this irreverent manner."

My bump of fun got the better of me; I roared with laughter. "Oh, Aunt Jemima, you will kill me if you go on! To think of calling old Pinchley 'a sacred thing'!"

"Brother! do you allow me to be insulted by this unmannerly child?" demanded Aunt Jem in tragic tones.

"Winnie, be silent!" from Father. But I saw his risible faculties were also strongly excited.

Aunt Jem glanced triumphantly at me. I had my revenge. My eye chanced to glance towards the carpet, whereon lay—a portion of Aunt Jem's "front!" Quick as thought I spoke to the footman. "George, be kind enough to pick up Aunt Jemima's curl." George obeyed, and handed it on a salver to its owner. I looked towards Ben, who was drinking beer. That glance was fatal. Poor Ben had to rush choking into the hall, where I joined him, and, seated on the lowest step of the staircase, gave vent to peal after peal of laughter. Five minutes later we returned to the table. Solemn silence lasted throughout the remainder of the meal.

CHAPTER II.

IT was Sunday morning, and we were starting for church. We did not much care for Sunday in a general way, and this Sunday we knew would not be very pleasant, for the Rector was away, and Mr. Pinchley was to do the whole service; sermon, alas! included.

The church was not far off, and as our good father held that the Sabbath was specially instituted for the repose of all working creatures, especially the brute creation, he would not allow his horses out on Sunday.

I was always uncomfortable on that day because I had to dress properly, and I hated dress. During the week I was accustomed to put on a clean print frock every morning, which I changed for a muslin one in the evening. A chestnut mane flowed over my shoulders, down to my waist, unrestrained by comb or net. Nurse groomed this mane twice a-day. On Sunday, however, I had to dress for church, and the mane was coerced into the semblance of humanity.

We always started in this order. First, our father and Aunt Jemima; then we two and Miss Parsons. We liked Miss Parsons; she was a kindly creature, and let us have our own way.

Aunt Jemima that day bloomed forth in a silk dress that "stood on end of itself," as nurse expressed it, and a bonnet of wondrous beauty, in which rose-buds and lilies did their best to produce a striking, nay appalling effect. One bud nestled jauntily, half against Aunt Jemima's front, half upon her polished brow. Then Aunt Jem had a most ravishing little parasol. On the whole, her "turn out" (as we called it) was tremendous, and contrasted wonderfully with that of quiet Miss Parsons, with her small slight figure, clad in her invariable suit of modest grey, her silvery undyed locks neatly braided beneath a plain straw bonnet, trimmed with white. We children knew, as well as though Aunt Jem had told us, for whose delectation her gorgeous "get up" was contrived; for whose, but that of Mr. Pinchley?

"Now, dear Winnie," said Miss Parsons, in soft pleading tones, like the cooing of a nice old grey dove, "*do* try to

behave well in church. Think for how short a time it lasts! And you will have plenty of time to laugh afterwards."

"Yes, but I shan't have the same things to *make* me laugh! Pinchley, you know, casting sheep's eyes (this word had been imported from Ben's school, and adopted with rapture by me)—I beg your pardon, dear, I forgot that you don't like that word;—well, casting tender glances between the heads of his 'discourse' at the heads in our pew. I fear he will to-day have to divide his sermon into four heads, and two tails, before his great mind can fully take in Aunt Jemima's ravishing bonnet."

"S-h-h-h, she will hear you," whispered Miss Parsons.

"I don't care if she does—old cat!"

"Oh Winnie, some day you may be old yourself, and then how would you like to be laughed at by your niece."

"If I deserved it, I should have to put up with it, I suppose. It is her own fault; she is spiteful against me because I am young. When I am old, I won't be spiteful against young people; I'll remember that I have had my turn, and that now it is theirs. Now, *you* are old, dear," I added with charming frankness; "but no one despises you for it; you are such a dear. Hallo! here's the conventicle."

"Oh pray, Winnie dear, don't say 'hallo,'" murmured Miss Parsons, as we entered the church.

The Rev. Mr. Pinchley had just entered the desk. Ben and I knelt down side by side, and gave each other a wicked "dudge," as we observed Aunt Jemima glance at him through the fingers of her mauve gloves. She and Papa and Miss Parsons sat at the top of the square family pew; Ben and I, "slantendicular," as we called it, that is, at right angles to them. Thus our position commanded a fine view of Aunt Jemmy and the Curate at the same time.

We managed to behave well, till the "Venite," calling forth Aunt Jemima's vocal powers, sent us into agonies of suppressed laughter. It seemed as if such roulades, quavers, trills, and howls, could only be caused by irrepressible anxiety to attract the attention of the Rev. Mr. Pinchley. Ben and I were in quiet convulsions. I kept my arms screwed tight against my sides, lest he should "dudge" me, and he did the same, for a similar reason. It was the greatest blessing to us, when the "Venite" came to an end.

Before the "Te Deum" began we had schooled ourselves

into propriety, and were able to preserve a sedate deportment throughout that remarkable performance. But when once Aunt Jemima got fairly under weigh in the Litany, we could only bury our faces in our hands, and choke as silently as possible. Aunt Jemmy's "Spare us, good Lord," uttered in stern contralto, was a fierce command; and in the next response, she pronounced the word "beseech," as though she were giving a forcible push to the person addressed, and wished him to feel that she was in earnest, and would stand no nonsense. However, all trials come to an end, sooner or later, and at last the morning service was over, and the sermon about to commence. Aunt Jemima's eyes were fixed upon the preacher with an expression of rapt devotion, suitable to a St. Cecilia in her best Sunday-going bonnet.

The sermon seemed to be addressed to the working-classes, and was intended to enforce the duty of contentment with their lot, and submission to their superiors. Whenever the Curate's eyes were not fixed upon our pew, they rested severely upon a very aged and decrepit female parishioner, who, throughout, preserved an expression of crumpled-up meekness and resignation, as though she were duly sensible of her many shortcomings, and of her sure title to eternal perdition.

His text was, "In my Father's house are many mansions." How on earth the preacher managed to twist that unhappy text so wide of its meaning, was a marvel; but he did, and, as he wended his dreary way through that chaos of a sermon, the poor old woman became more and more crumpled up, and Aunt Jemima more and more enrapt. Whenever he used the words, "Dear friends" (a favourite expression of his) or "Beloved," his eyes rested for a moment on our pew; when he talked of "sinners," the poor abject old woman felt that his eye was upon her.

"Beloved," (Aunt Jemima bridled and blushed) "there are in truth 'many mansions' in that blest abode, whither we are journeying, all of us, miserable sinners," (the old woman quailed) "as we are. And what are these 'mansions'? Have you ever thought—ever reflected, on what they must be? Are they hovels? Are they palaces? Nay, I fear that few among you, my friends" (a sweeping glance all through the church, except in the free seats)—"Yes, few among you have endeavoured to reason out the meaning of this sentence.

After much thought, much research, much cogitation, I have been led to the irresistible conclusion that the word 'mansions' means 'dwellings.' And what are dwellings? Are they necessarily palaces? Are they unavoidable hovels? My dear friends, they are *abodes*. And what are abodes?—simply places to live in. Do we *live*, in Heaven? I think you will not dispute this fact, borne out alike by science and revelation. Thus we have decided, dear friends, that the sentence may be understood thus:—'In my Father's house are various *abodes*.' And with a little more reflection, on comparing the next state with this, we must arrive at the conclusion, that, as dwelling-houses vary in degree here, so they will do there. There will be palaces for the rich, and cottages for the poor. The educated here, will be educated there; the ignorant here, will be ignorant there. As 'like meets like,' the poor and uneducated will herd together, and so will the rich. It is so simple—so natural!

"Oh then ye poor, why strive against your employers? why be discontented with your wages? Why give eye-service and lip-service instead of the service of the heart and will? Alas! the ingratitude of the poor may well steel the hearts of their employers against them! But, oh! ye long-suffering employers, in your patience 'possess ye your souls;' for 'great shall be your reward in Heaven!' Now to God the Father," etc., etc.

All sense of the ludicrous had passed from me long before the conclusion of this discourse. I was swelling with indignation, and instead of uttering the customary prayer before leaving the church, I was overheard by Ben ejaculating, "Beast! Humbug! Canting fool!" etc., etc. When we were outside, I looked for poor crumpled-up old Betsey Lake, and did not see her at first; but, bethinking me that she had gone perhaps to lay a flower upon her daughter's grave, I looked in that direction, and there I saw her.

Papa and Aunt Jemima had gone on; so we persuaded Miss Parsons to stay with us till old Betsey came hobbling towards us.

"Ah, Miss Winnie, and how be you, Miss, and Master Ben? My service to you, Miss Parsons, ma'am," said the poor, meek old thing.

"We are very glad to see you, Betsey," I said. "How is your cough?"

"It don't mend much, Miss. I don't think I shall ever mend

much either. It's time I was gone;—a poor useless old woman like me"—she moaned.

"Nonsense Betsey! Do you believe all that Mr. Pinchley has been saying?" ("No, I *will* speak," to Miss Parsons, who was pulling my sleeve to stop me.) "I mean, all that he said about the rich having better places in Heaven than the poor?"

"Ah, a powerful discourse! a powerful discourse, Miss Winnie," said old Betsey. "It seemed to turn me inside out, and send me all of a tremble. He's a fine scholar, is Mr. Pinchley, but his sermons don't cheer a poor working body up, like Mr. Gascoign's."

"Well Betsey, I dont' think Mr. Gascoign would have approved of Mr. Pinchley's sermon to-day; so don't you let it trouble you. You will have quite as good a place in Heaven as Mr. Pinchley!—perhaps, a better! Mr. Gascoign will be back in a day or two, and you can ask him what he thinks about it."

"It would ill-become the likes of me to question what a learned young gentleman, like Mr. Pinchley, and who had a college eddication, says, is true, Miss. And as for the 'abode' I shall get there, I shall be humbly thankful to have a two-roomed cottage rent free, with a pig—are there any pigs in Heaven—Miss?"

"I don't know, Betsey; perhaps; but I hope not, for they smell abominably."

"Well, Miss, I was a goin' for to say, as I'd liefer have a two-roomed cottage up there, than be like some people think we'll be like,—dressed up in a long white bed-gown, a 'sittin' on a cloud, flapping their wings. I wants to be *myself*, you know, Miss, and not a sort of half-bird, like; and so I'd like to have a two-roomed cottage, rent free, with a chimney as didn't smoke, and a pig (a bit of roast pork in winter time is so sweet, Miss!) and a few fowls, and a little bit of tea and sugar, and coals. And then I'd have my poor gal to live with me, and if Mr. Pinchley had his pallis, I wouldn't grudge it to him. No, Miss, when I met him, I'd make my obedience and say, 'my service to you, sir.'—But Miss, it fretted me sore, to hear him say that we are that wicked and ungrateful. Yes, that did hurt me, Miss!"

"Never mind, Betsey; he will know better when he gets to Heaven, if he ever does get there."

And so we passed on, and I bore with much sweetness a

lecture from Miss Parsons: calling her 'a dear old thing' when she had ended, and assuring her that not one word she had said had produced the least effect upon me.

We dined in the middle of the day on Sunday, and generally skirmished with Aunt Jemima all through the repast. Papa used to look pained, and Miss Parsons nervous, but that did not hinder us. Ben and I called our Sunday dinner "the sporting season," and regularly laid ourselves out for war.

On this occasion, as ill-luck would have it, Aunt Jemima took the lead, by commenting enthusiastically on the morning sermon. As no one responded, she addressed herself directly to our father, who replied, with some reserve, that he had certainly heard sermons which had pleased him more.

"Indeed, brother? Then there is no accounting for taste. I thought it the most eloquent discourse I had ever listened to. My attention was riveted. I could have listened for hours without fatigue. Mr. Pinchley's view of the future state was so novel—so striking!"

"Perhaps," assented my father, very dryly.

Aunt Jemmy was nettled. Ben and I kicked each other under the table, in anticipation of some fun.

"And pray, Brother, what portion of the sermon did you not agree with?"

"The whole," replied my father, more dryly than before.

Aunt Jemima's nose coloured; it did, when she was angry. I was revelling in delight at the thought that a "mill" (as I elegantly termed it) was impending. In my excitement, I let fly a bread pellet which I had been moulding under the table, and had intended for Ben, in the wrong direction, and it hit Aunt Jemima full upon her already scarlet nose.

She jumped up. "Who aimed that bread pill?" she indignantly demanded.

Now, the firer of a bread pellet considers it an excellent joke, and the sign of a cool marksman, to appear totally unconscious of anything. After taking a shot, we always gazed upwards, straight at the ceiling, as if absorbed in the scrutiny of a remarkably interesting fly, stationed there; consequently, Ben's head and mine were thrown back, our eyes were upturned, and no answer was made. "I insist on knowing," demanded Aunt Jemima, "who fired that bread pill?"

"Winnie," asked Father, "who did it?"

"Miss Parsons, Papa dear," I replied with so innocent a look, that Ben went off into shrieks of laughter.

"Oh, Winnie! how can you! I assure you, Miss Travers, I am incapable of such a gross act of rudeness! Indeed, indeed," pleaded poor Miss Parsons, in great distress.

"Of course, of course," said Papa, trying all he could to look grave.

"Winnie," begged Miss Parsons, "do say who it was."

"Well, then, it was me!" I cried, regardless of grammar; "and I didn't mean it for Aunt Jemima,—I meant it for Ben. But I'm not sorry—I'm very glad, and I wish it had hit old Pinchley too!"

And with that I rushed headlong from the room, to avoid being turned out. Ben followed, as usual, and we retreated to the schoolroom, and nursed the two cats.

I haven't mentioned our pets, by the way, but we had three, the cats aforesaid; an elderly tabby, named 'Vixen,' on account of the exceeding acidity of her temper; and a young tortoise-shell, beautiful to look upon, and with a heavenly disposition. Between ourselves we used to liken the vixen to Aunt Jemima, and to say she was spiteful to Pearl on account of her superior youth and beauty. They were both ladies, and Pearl had a little kitten, the counterpart of herself, which Vixen, herself a most inattentive mother, frequently took away from poor Pearl, sitting upon it to prevent its escape. Pearl would sit, sad and tearful, not daring to assert her rights; if she approached one step towards her own property, Vixen would utter a low, rumbling growl, whereupon Pearl would immediately relapse into sadness and melancholy. At this crisis, I held Pearl and her kitten, while Ben had Vixen. Pearl lay purring rapturously; Vixen growled and snarled whenever she looked at the kitten.

"I say Winnie," said Ben," "doesn't Vixen remind you of Aunt Jem?"

"Exactly, Ben; if Aunt Jem were a cat, she'd be exactly like Vixen."

"Except," said Ben, "that Vixen is handsome, though she is such a growly wowly, and old Jemmy is a fright."

"I don't know, Ben; *is* Aunt Jemmy a fright? I think she can't be so very ugly; only she is such a crab, that we don't like her. I fancy she is really better looking than Miss Parsons and Nurse."

"Well, perhaps. Hallo! here's our father!"

"Children," said our father, as he entered the room, "I am really vexed—nay, displeased—with you."

"Oh! Papa dear!" from both of us.

"Yes, children—yes, dears!" (touched by our sad looks.) "You don't *mean* to be naughty, I know: but you let your spirits get the better of you, till you don't know where to stop. Now, you do *not* treat your Aunt Jemima with the respect due to her age and sex."

"Father dear," I pleaded, "if Aunt Jemima bore with *us* on account of our youth."

"And sex," blundered little Ben.

"No dear Bennie," I said, "sex has nothing to do with it, as you are a boy;—but, dear Father, if she remembered that we are young, and made allowance, we should make allowance for her being old. But she doesn't."

"Well, dears, there may be something in that: but (to quit that topic) I am exceedingly vexed at your misbehaviour in church. Setting aside the *irreverence* of the thing, there is something so very *low-bred*, so altogether vulgar and out of place in anything but the very quietest manner while in a place of worship, that to see my children behave as you did this morning, is a positive grief to me."

"Father, we *wont* ill-behave in church again! will we Winnie?" exclaimed dear little Ben.

"No, Papa, that we won't! we both promise."

"Then, I shall be able to say so to Mr. Pinchley, when I see him, eh, dears! He overtook us on the way home to-day, and asked when I should be alone, as he had something very especial to speak to me about. I replied, that I should be away to-morrow, till the evening, but that on Tuesday morning I should be at home and disengaged. After he had gone, your Aunt Jemima said to me that she feared he was going to complain of your conduct in church."

"Oh! *that's* it—is it?" I mused. However, Papa was satisfied, and after he had left us, we strolled out into the grounds, and spent the rest of that Sabbath afternoon in planning schemes of aggression. Aunt Jemima did not like cats, (what old maid ever did?) so we marched into tea, each armed with a cat. On Sunday we always had a first and second tea; the first, just a little stop-gap at five o'clock; the second, comprising cold meats, tea and coffee, and wine for those who liked it, after evening service.

Our father never appeared at the afternoon tea; and during his absence we could plague Aunt Jemima to our heart's content. So we sat at the table armed with our cats; and it was balm to our souls to see the looks of abhorrence levelled at them by her.

"Really Winifred," she said at last, "I think it *too* revolting that you should bring these loathsome creatures to the tea-table."

"Indeed, Aunt Jemima!" I answered, with my most amiable smile. It is so provoking, to be smiled at amiably after you have said a disagreeable thing! "Yes, indeed, Miss Pert!" Aunt Jemima also took advantage of our father's absence. We thought it fun, and liked to see her lose her temper.

"Oh, you Vixen!" I exclaimed, apparently addressing the cat in my lap; "Ben, do change with me; I really think the old thing is becoming dangerous." (All the while I was rubbing Vixen's coat the wrong way, to make her growl.)

"No thank you, Winnie," replied Ben, "I don't like old tabbies; they are always so spiteful!"

"You nasty cross old ugly thing!" I persisted, still pretending to address the cat, who was now growling and snarling portentously, "really, when people become old and crabbed, they ought to be drowned."

"Yes," said Ben, "how cross she is to dear pretty little Pearl! All jealousy, because she is old and ugly, and Pearl is young and pretty."

"She's just like a nasty sour disappointed old maid, Ben. I suppose her ill-temper springs from her age and ugliness, and so we must try to pity her."

"Winifred," exclaimed Aunt Jemima, goaded beyond endurance, "If that cat remains in the room, I leave it!"

"Indeed, I am so sorry, Aunt Jemima," I pertly replied, smiling more amiably than before, "Ben, open the door for Aunt Jemima." Ben rose to do so. Aunt Jem beside herself, advanced to the charge, and seized Vixen, whom I let go. Instantly, "Growly-Wowly" flew at her assailant's face, and left one long deep scratch upon her "nasal promontory" (as Ben called it), and flying over her shoulder, bolted through the open window. There was a scream from Aunt Jemima, who immediately buried her wounded feature in her pocket handkerchief. We roared with laughter. Miss Parsons advanced to sympathise. After a few minutes Aunt

Jem raised her face, only to storm. As she did so, one drop of gore slowly welled down her nose and fell in her lap. Miss Parsons soothingly began, "Oh, how sorry I am, my dear Miss Travers! That naughty cat! You will be marked!"

"It was all that girl's doing!" cried Aunt Jem, beside herself with rage, "She flung the cat at me!"

"She didn't! It's a lie!" shouted Ben, taking my part.

"Ben, for shame!" said Miss Parsons, "it is ungentlemanly to speak so to a lady!"

"Let her behave like one, and I'll treat her like one," said Ben. "She'd just better let Winnie alone! But I beg *your* pardon Miss Parsons, you *are* a lady, and I ought not to have said 'lie' in that way before you!"

After that, everybody subsided into silent indignation. Aunt Jemima retired to her room, no doubt to bathe her wounds. Before long the first bell for evening service began to ring, and we went to dress for church.

"Now do be good, there's a dear," said nurse, giving the last finishing touch to my tucked-up mane. "If you are good, little Ben is sure to be good, for he takes pattern by you in everything."

"It is all that horrid old Aunt Jemima, nurse," I pleaded, "she *is* so aggravating!"

"Well, I know that, dear, and you never spoke a truer word," replied dear injudicious nurse; "but never you mind, dear, you try and be good, and then little Ben will be good too. Don't you be always giving that old thing a handle against you, my lamb. Why, it's all along of her aggravating ways, that your poor father's going to marry again."

"Do you think he *really* will, nurse?"

"Oh yes, dear, I'm afraid it's all settled." I sighed heavily.

"Second bell!" cried Ben, from the garden. "Come along Win!"

We were very good in church; partly to please Father, partly because I fell into a deep slumber, from which I was roused by the words "Sleeper awake!" accompanied by a heavy sounding of cannonading—so it seemed to me. I dreamt the end of the world had come, and woke in a dreadful fright.

It was only Mr. Pinchley, who was preaching what some people called "one of his delightfully impressive sermons."

We thought them great fun; the Curate used on these occasions to rave, rant, and thump the cushion in a manner edifying to behold, and deeply affecting his admirers. Aunt Jemima was moved even unto tears. We walked home on the broad grin. Aunt Jem saw us laughing.

We all assembled at tea, Ben and I trying to smother our merriment, but nothing untoward happened till tea was nearly over; then Aunt Jem's anger got the better of her.

"Your sleep in church seems to have refreshed you, Winifred?"

"Yes, Aunt Jemima, indeed it has," I responded with cheerful alacrity.

"If you were a little more attentive in church, and a little quieter at meals, I should be better pleased," snapped Aunt Jem.

"What a blessing that would be!" I retorted, rather snappishly in my turn.

"Indeed, Miss Pert!" sneered Aunt Jemima, forgetful of my father's presence.

A pause. A cessation of hostilities for a few seconds. Both armies were preparing for combat. Who was to fire first? I did.

"Ben," I said, "something has stung me! Ah, it is that horrid 'old maid' fly. It has buzzed about us all the afternoon. One ought to have no pity on those old maids; they *will* try to do mischief."

"I wonder what has turned the milk off," interrupted Ben; "it is quite sour."

"No wonder," said I, with a little glance at Aunt Jem.

"Ah, poor child!" Aunt Jemima now fairly exasperated, hissed out her words, "perhaps the milk will not be so sour at school!"

"Winnie is *not* going to school," shouted Ben in wrath.

"She is! And if she gets her deserts there, she will get a whipping every day,—the unmannerly cub!"

I saw Papa's eye dilate in utter consternation. I saw Ben leap up, and shake his fist in frantic rage at Aunt Jemima. Then the poor little boy, trying to brush up the bad language he had heard at school, let fly the astounding expression, "Pinchley be hanged!"

"Go on, Ben," from me, in rapturous excitement.

"Oh Brother!" exclaimed Aunt Jem, appealing to Father,

"can you allow such language to be applied to the pillars of the church—the Church of England."

"Hang the pillars and the church too! Hang the Church of England!" roared Ben, as he rushed from the room, followed by me, then by Miss Parsons, then by Father.

Aunt Jemima remained in possession of the field!

CHAPTER III.

"WINNIE," began our father, speaking more sternly than I had ever heard him speak, "I must talk with Ben alone."

Miss Parsons turned to leave the school-room; so did I, and as Papa closed the door after us, we heard him lock it, to avoid all chance of interruption.

I sat on the stairs a little way down, listening to the ticking of the old clock, watching the hands go round. Half-an-hour passed away. It seemed to me that this dreadful interview would never come to an end. The hand was just touching the X; the clock, after giving one long "r-r-r-r-r-r!" struck at last I. II. III. IV. V. VI. VII. VIII. IX. X!

The school-room door opened, and my father came out. Through the open door I heard the sound of sobbing. Oh! my poor little brother! I was rushing up to join him, when my father stopped me.

"No Winnie, I wish Ben to be alone for the next half-hour, to think over what I have been saying."—And he passed on. His look of stern displeasure angered me, and roused all the rebel in my nature. I returned to my seat on the staircase, to watch for another half hour. From where I sat, I could hear the sound of Father's and Aunt Jemima's voices; his, exceedingly quiet, hers, loud and shrill.

Would that half hour never come to an end! Oh my dear little Ben! My poor little brother! In trouble for taking my part! I was too angry for tears, or I should have wept hopelessly when I thought of him.

But the minute hand did at last approach the goal. I arose noiselessly.

Twenty-seven minutes.

Twenty-eight.

Twenty-nine,—and a half.

I had been backing up-stairs, and as the minute hand touched the half hour, my fingers were on the handle of the door. There was a sound of sobbing within. I entered. Little Ben's arms were cast upon the table, his face buried in them, his poor little body shaking and quivering all over with grief.

"Ben darling! My dear Ben! Oh, *don't* cry Ben! Don't! Don't!" I was weeping piteously myself at the sight of his grief.

I raised his poor little face to my shoulder. He nestled close to me.

"Oh do be comforted Ben," I pleaded. "Father will forgive you. I know he will!"

"It isn't *that*," he sobbed; "oh Winnie! Winnie!"

"What is it dear? Tell me."

He tried to speak; but could not; a passion of choking sobs seemed to stop his breath. There was a little tap at the door, and nurse came in.

"My dear little man! my dear Bennie!" said nurse, drawing him into her arms, "don't take on so!"

"He has something on his mind nurse, and it chokes him when he tries to tell what it is."

"Tell me, my king! Tell poor old nurse," she begged.

"Oh! I'm—— I'm——"

"What Ben? Try and gulp down all the rest, and tell what *particularly* dreadful thing is going to happen," I urged.

"Yes, my man; you'll feel better after."

Ben made a great effort, and then sobbed forth, "I'm dis—disgraced! I'm not a gen—gen—gen—"

"—Not a gentleman, Ben? Oh come now, that won't do! Has Father been saying that? But he doesn't think it Ben; it is all that old Jem's fault, *she* has put into his head!"

"Yes," quoth nurse, adding fuel to fire, "those old maids are so spiteful to young folks. I'm sure there could not be two better children going; though of course you have fine healthy spirits, as all healthy children have."

"Nasty old cat!" I exclaimed; "If I don't pay her out for this! She has been talking to Papa all this time, trying to make more mischief!"

"Oh! but I *am* in the wrong this time," sobbed Ben, "and Papa is right! He said that no *gentleman* used bad language at *all*, and that to do so in the presence of a lady was a disgrace. And it is true. I feel that I have disgraced myself."

"My dear Ben," I argued, "that old thing is aggravating enough to provoke a saint. I am quite sure that if either St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John, St. Paul, or any of the other people, had to do with old Jemmy, they would use bad language."

"And they couldn't be off it," put in nurse.

"But they were not all of them gentlemen," argued Ben. "St. Luke was, I suppose, and St. Paul, perhaps."

"Never mind, dear," I answered, "it doesn't much matter. Old Jem richly deserved it."

"Perhaps she did Winnie, but I've disgraced myself all the same, and Father says that when a gentleman has forgotten himself there is only *one* way to make amends."

"What is that, dear?"

"To apologise, Winnie."

"I wouldn't do anything of the sort," I exclaimed. "The old thing would only triumph over you."

"I can't help it Winnie; I shall despise myself if I don't do it. Besides, I have displeased dear Papa, and this is the only amends I can make to him."

Miss Parsons here entered the room and told us we ought to be in bed. She kissed Ben more tenderly than usual, and said, "Poor little fellow," in such pitying accents, that I threw my arms around her, and declared she was "a dear old brick!"

And so we went to bed. Children's troubles seldom last long; and when Ben made his appearance at the breakfast table next morning, there was no trace of his grief of the preceding night. Evidently however, he had been screwing up his courage for a great effort; for he held his head up, and marched quickly into the room, and straight up to Aunt Jemima. Then, very distinctly, though in a tremulous voice, he said,

"Aunt Jemima, I have come to ask your pardon for my rudeness to you last night. I disgraced myself, and I am sorry for it. Will you forgive me?"

Our dear father, who had had a sadly put out look, brightened up; quite a sunbeam seemed to flash over his face. Aunt Jem, whose efforts to reduce the inflamed aspect of her nose had resulted in a general glossiness of that feature, answered frigidly, "It is the part of a gentleman to apologise when he has behaved so disgracefully as you did last night Benjamin; and it is the part of a Christian to forgive. I forgive you!"

He had put up his good little face for a kiss; but none was vouchsafed. My blood boiled.

Then Ben turned to Miss Parsons, and said, "Will you forgive me too? I am so sorry!"

"Come and kiss me, Ben darling," from that kind soul.

"And you, Winnie, dear?"

"Oh you silly boy!" I exclaimed, "I'm sure you were provoked beyond endurance. *I* didn't blame you!" (with a vicious glance at Aunt Jem.)

Then little Ben looked up at Father, whose eyes were glistening. *Such* a smile as met Ben's beseeching look, and when the boy sprang into his arms, Father said to him, "You have made amends! God bless you darling!"

And so it ought to have ended; but fate and Aunt Jemima willed otherwise.

"Winifred," she began, in tones which at once kindled into a blaze all the dormant opposition aroused by her unkind reception of poor Ben's apology, "Winifred, what did you mean by saying that to Ben?"

"Just that and no more!" I answered brusquely.

"I consider," she went on, "that you are the most unmannerly cub in existence!"

"Mind your own business!" I retorted, goaded to fury. "You are a horrid old maid, and I hate you, and I am glad Vixen scratched your hideous old nose, and I only wish she had torn off your frowsy old wig!"

"Go to your room Winifred," our father sternly interposed, "and stay there till I give you leave to quit it."

I obeyed. Ben made a movement to follow, and was desired to remain in his place.

In my room I remained in a state of mute rage. Not a tear did I shed; I was much too angry. An hour passed away; then Papa's horse was brought round, and I remembered that he was going out, and would not be back till dinner time, if then.

"Does he think I'm going to remain here a prisoner all day? No, indeed," I thought, "as soon as he is gone I shall go down-stairs."

I had hardly thought thus, when my father's step approached the door. The key was on the other side. I heard him turn it in the lock, take it out, and go away.

I could hardly believe this had happened. That Father should treat *me* thus,—me!

It was not long before Miss Parsons came to hold a parley.

"Winnie dear, I have the key," she said, in her nice cooing voice, so unlike Aunt Jem's, "but I have promised

your papa not to let you out except upon certain conditions."

"All right dear," I answered, "I am very jolly here."

This was all bravado, for I was *not* "jolly." I wanted to go for a ride with Ben.

"I can't bear that you should be alone, dear Winnie," she went on; "If I come in, will you promise to stay in your room?"

"Yes dear, I won't do anything you disapprove."

So she came in, and opened negociations.

"Winnie, your papa won't allow you to go down-stairs until you have apologised to Miss Travers."

"— See her hanged first!" was my ladylike reply.

"Oh Winnie! Winnie! how you do grieve me with your dreadful language!"

"Well dear, I will try not to do so. But really, I should as soon think of apologising to 'old Nick' himself as to old Jem. See what poor Ben got by it!"

"But Ben did it because it was *right*, Winnie."

"I don't care; I will not do it, because I think it would be wrong."

"*Do*, Winnie!"

"No."

"Not to please me?"

"No, not even to please you, though you *are* such a dear!"

Presently Miss Parsons had to go down to Ben, who was in a sad way about me. While she was away Aunt Jemima came into the garden, and sat down on a seat which commanded a full view of my window and of me sitting at it. I forthwith commenced a song, whereof the words were as follows:—

"Aunt Jem she would a wooing go,
Heigh ho! said Rowley,
Whether old Pinchley would let her or no,
With a roley-poley, gammon and spinach.
Heigh ho! said Anthony Roley.

"She bought a new bonnet and parasol gay,
Heigh ho! said Roley,
She thought these fine things would gain her the day
With a roley-poley, gammon and spinach, etc.

"She said, sure to-morrow, dear man he'll propose,
Heigh ho! said Roley,
Alas! ere to-morrow the cat scratched her nose,
With a roley-poley, gammon and spinach, etc.

"Thus she lost both her beauty and also her swain,
Heigh ho! said Roley,
Foolish Aunt Jemmy don't do it again!
With a roley-poley, gammon and spinach," etc.

This parody on a popular air, I had composed while "getting up" that morning. I now sang it loudly and distinctly, emphasising every word. Aunt Jem was furious; she saw, that though imprisoned, I was not conquered.

"Unfortunate child!" she exclaimed, addressing me, "I suppose you have received your Father's message?"

For all answer, I recommenced—

"Aunt Jem she would a wooing go."

As soon as I paused, Aunt Jemima soliloquised, "Yes, she is a most unfortunate creature! Shut up for being naughty! Poor little girl!"

I tuned my pipes afresh,—

"Old Pinchley he wouldn't a wooing go,
Heigh ho! said Roley,
Whether Aunt Jemmy she wished it or no,
With a roley-poley, gammon and spinach," etc.

"I will not stay here to be insulted!" cried Aunt Jem, flouncing away in a fury. My derisive laughter followed her.

There was a tap at the door. It was Ben.

"Winnie—Winnie dear! Oh what a shame to lock you up, like a child! What a shame! What a shame! It was all her doings, the nasty old cat! If I don't pay her out for it!"

"It is a bore, Ben. How nice it would be, to be riding in the wood now."

"Oh Winnie, do say you are sorry!"

"Never, Ben!" I indignantly replied. "Besides, I'm not sorry!"

"Then make an apology; do dear, Winnie!"

I heard that it was all he could do to keep from weeping.

Miss Parsons came to the door. I heard her say, "Ben dear, your papa made me promise there should be no communication with Winnie."

"Well, I will go," said poor Ben, "but oh Winnie, *do* make *some* sort of apology!"

"Never!" I said, and again I was left alone.

The day was wearing on. It was twelve o'clock, the time when Ben and I generally rode. Luncheon was at half-past one. "I wonder whether I am to be starved as well as imprisoned," I thought. "But nurse will see to that."

Another half hour passed. I began to wish that I had not so resolutely refused to apologise, and yet I felt that if I were again asked, I would give just the same answer. Then, thinking of apologies, I remembered amongst other things having heard how some person who had insulted some other person, apologised in such a manner, that the apology was worse than the insult. I caught at the idea with rapture. So, when Miss Parsons again came to my door, and renewed her entreaties, I declared that I had changed my mind, and now was most anxious to apologise. Miss Parsons thereupon unlocked the door; and down we went to the dining-room, where luncheon was ready. Ben leaped up with delight, and sprang forward to greet me.

"Has that girl come to her senses yet?" demanded Aunt Jem.

"Winnie has come to apologise," Miss Parsons quickly replied.

"Better late than never, Miss Pert," pursued Aunt Jem, addressing me.

"Yes, my poor old Aunt," I answered, "I *do* apologise to you for having forgotten what a poor disappointed old thing you are. I pity you, Aunt Jemima, for being old and ugly, and wanting to be thought young and pretty. This must sour your temper, and I ought to be patient. It was very wrong of me not to remember this. I *do* apologise in that sense, Aunt Jemima."

"Oh Winnie, Winnie! that is not the sort of apology your papa intended!" interposed Miss Parsons.

"How am I to know what Papa 'intended' me to say? He locked me up at poor old Aunt Jemima's instigation, and went away without saying anything more."

Aunt Jem was livid with rage. Ben was choking with ill-concealed merriment.

"Do you dare defy me? insolent little minx!" from Aunt Jemima.

"Oh no, poor Aunt Jemima, I'm *so* sorry for you! and your poor nose—can I do anything for it?" I asked in a tone of humble solicitude.

Ben could restrain himself no longer. He roared with laughter.

"Don't laugh at poor Aunt Jemima, you 'unmannerly cub!'" I said. "What does your copybook tell you? 'Respect the aged.'"

Aunt Jemima rose and swept out of the room. Then Miss Parsons gave me a good scolding, which I at last silenced by a bear-like hug; and so we adjourned to the school-room for our so-called lessons, till four o'clock, when we either rode, drove, or walked. To-day we drove. Miss Parsons went with us.

Ben was very quiet, evidently enjoying a capital joke all to himself.

"Ben, do tell me what fun you are thinking of," I pleaded.

"Not for the world, Win," he answered. "I shan't let you know anything, and then you can't be blamed."

"Oh! don't get yourself into any more trouble, dear Bennie."

"All right! never fear," said Ben.

"Is Pinchley coming to dine to-day?" I asked of Miss Parsons.

"I believe so."

"Then old Jem will have him all to herself if Father is not back in time for dinner," I said. "Oh by the bye, there is a 'tabby-fight' in the evening."

"Some ladies are coming to tea, I believe, Winnie. Now I wish you would not talk slang!"

"Well, I won't, dear. Oh! what a dreadfully stupid evening it will be. Those old things will be wanting a round game, and we shall have to behave pretty! Not half such fun as having Pinchley alone, and watching old Jem 'sloping up' to him."

"Winnie, Winnie!" ejaculated Miss Parsons, "I thought you promised not to talk slang!"

"Well, I won't then. Ben, what are you laughing at to yourself?"

"That's *my* secret," said Ben.

That evening I had to be "groomed and caparisoned," as Ben called it, to my very great annoyance. However, at last it was over, and I began to descend the stairs. I found Ben waiting for me.

"Well, you do look stunning, Winnie! You *are* growing

awfully pretty! Some day you'll be growing up, and then gentlemen will pay you compliments; and won't old Jemmy be savage!"

He paused a moment as we passed her room, and listened.

"Do you think she's gone down, Winnie?" he asked.

"Don't know."

So down we went to the drawing-room, where we found Aunt Jemima talking to Mr. Pinchley, who had arrived early. Ben disappeared, and through the open door I saw him run up-stairs. Presently dinner was announced. Ben joined us in the hall.

Mr. Pinchley said grace, and asked a "blessing upon the food provided." Ben chuckled exceedingly.

"Allow me," said the Curate, softly shifting the soup tureen, to relieve Aunt Jemima. The contents of the soup ladle evidently puzzled him. It descended into the soup plate with a splash;—something, long, dark, indescribable.

"Oh! *not* the kitten," I ejaculated in piteous accents.

"What can it be?" from Mr. Pinchley.

"Let me see," said Ben, "I seem to know it."

He was seated next to Mr. Pinchley, and, regardless of manners, pulled the soup plate towards him. Then, with a fork dexterously planted in a firm portion of the Thing, he slowly raised it aloft.

Mr. Pinchley gazed upon it in utter bewilderment.

It was not the kitten, thank Heaven!

"Why, Aunt Jemima, it's your front!" exclaimed Ben.

Forgetful of politeness, the Curate's eyes immediately sought Aunt Jemima's head, doubtless expecting to find it devoid of hirsute adornment. But no, there was the usual complement of bands and ringlets.

"Its her every-day front—not her best Sunday and party-going. She wears *that* this evening. Who will have some *hair* soup?"

There was a blank silence. Miss Parsons, I saw, could have sunk into the earth. The Curate was no less embarrassed. Aunt Jemima saved the "situation" by coming out with a fib.

"It is false! I wear my own hair!"

"Of course! of course!" assented poor Mr. Pinchley, gradually recovering presence of mind. "No one would think otherwise for one moment, dear Miss Travers. It will

be many, many years before, in your case, art must be called in (as it very frequently and quite justifiably is) in aid of beauty."

Of course the soup was removed. A blank had fallen upon all of us. Miss Parsons, I could see, regarded me with grave suspicion. I felt perfectly certain who was the culprit; and he had again offended for my sake.

Dinner wended its slow way along. There was a generally limp appearance amongst us all, till, fortunately, Miss Parsons asked the name of a Roman Catholic priest who was on a visit in the neighbourhood. This was like laying a spark to a train of gunpowder. The Curate had a righteous horror of all "Romanists," as he called them, and fired up accordingly.

"The unhappy man's name is Doran; Irish of course."

"Yes," responded Aunt Jemima, who was gradually rallying after the *hair* soup, "Yes, and a Jesuit no doubt."

"The law ought to put a stop to it," he continued with emphasis.

"To what?" asked Miss Parsons in her innocence.

"To—to—a—a—all that sort of thing, you know," replied the Curate, not quite prepared.

His Reverence, though he could fulminate from his own pulpit, was a nervous and fidgetty man. He fidgetted with his hands, his pocket-handkerchief, his hat; he walked and bowed in a fidgetty way; his very laugh was a fidget. Besides this, there was an affectation, an unreality, about the man, that fidgeted one. Also, though he spoke, walked, bowed, laughed, and behaved generally in a "sugary" manner, (I don't know any other word that would express my meaning), you had an impression that the walk, the laugh, the voice, the bow, were all a sham together, yet not so great a sham as the man himself. Moreover, even I, child though I was, had a most distinct impression that Mr. Pinchley was not a gentleman. And yet he was useful in his way, and a very efficient help to Mr. Gascoign.

"You mean the whole system?" asked Aunt Jemima, her aspect filled with tender reverence, as she raised her small grey eyes towards his small drab ones.

"Yes, the whole system," he replied, in his soft, simpering voice; "the whole system from beginning to end! It is a system of Idolatry!"

"Ah!" sighed Aunt Jemima, "it is sad to think that so many poor creatures are sliding down to the bottomless pit! But, since it is the Lord's will, we must thank Him for it!"

"What do you think about it, Miss Winifred?" he asked, turning his ugly little eyes in my direction.

"Well," I replied, with my usual frankness, "I don't believe that Roman Catholics go to hell any more than Protestants, or Jews, or Turks, or Dissenters, or low Church people."

"What charming candour. I do love young people to be frank," responded Pinchley, with enthusiasm.

I longed to let fly a pellet, then just completed, at his nose.

"Frankness," commented Aunt Jemima, "is too often the cloak for *rudeness*."

"Just so, my beloved brethren—I mean, my dear Miss Travers, but not in Miss Winnie's case, I am sure. She is altogether incapable of rudeness!"

How I hated him. He did look so like a jelly fish, I thought.

"But do you not think you may be a little mistaken, Miss Winnie?" he asked. "If you read some parts of the Epistles and again of Revelations——"

"No," I stoutly replied, "Nothing could ever make me believe that it is 'God's will' that the great mass of mankind will suffer tortures for ever. I can't believe it! I won't believe it! and I don't believe it! There!"

"I like to see enthusiasm," said the Curate, with a sickly smile; "but alas, my dear Miss Winnie, your sentiments, alike honourable to your head and heart, are not borne out by Holy Scripture."

"I don't care whether they are, or not. If I believed it to be God's will that Roman Catholics should go to hell for ever, I should not—could not—love God."

"If you will permit me, Miss Winifred, I shall be most happy to go through a course of reading with you, which will convince you."

"No, nothing would convince me," I interrupted.

"Still, I think a course of reading might be profitable; say, three times a week,—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, for instance."

"Certainly not, Mr. Pinchley; it would bore me dreadfully," I ungraciously replied.

"Perverse child!" severely interposed Aunt Jemima; "if

Mr. Pinchley had made *me* such an offer, I should have embraced it with joy; such readings would tend to edification and chastening of spirit."

"Then perhaps you will be kind enough to transfer your offer to Aunt Jemima, will you, Mr. Pinchley?" I asked, rather in dread lest he might get over my father, and induce him to enforce the said "course of reading."

"Nay," pleaded the gentle Pinchley, "your Aunt Jemima is already a ripe Christian, with well established and soundly orthodox views."

"And yet," argued Aunt Jem, "I still feel perplexed on some heads; there are *some* little points of doctrine upon which I should like to feel assured, in order that I might with more certainty be able to instruct others."

"Nay," again remonstrated the beleaguered Curate with a courtly bow, "I am sure it is not for *me* to attempt to bias a mind so perfectly informed and altogether so well balanced as yours, my very dear Miss Travers."

And so poor Aunt Jem was foiled.

The hall bell sounded; it was Papa just returned. He came in and sat down with Mr. Pinchley. We adjourned to the drawing-room. Soon afterwards, the "tabbies," as we called them, began to arrive.

Aunt Jem was much given to the society of "tabbies;" Ben said, it was because she thought they set her off. Certainly she looked younger, when surrounded by a bevy of these old ladies. She pleaded that she had always loved to show respect and give pleasure to her elders. Be that as it might, certain it is that young ladies were seldom invited by her. She was very popular with the "tabbies," who flattered her to the top of her bent. And yet, how much good there was in Aunt Jemima!

"Ben," I said, "look at these old things! How they do 'butter up' old Jem for the sake of being invited here. Just look at them!"

"Oh Winnie, and didn't she try and get Pinchley to have those tater-tates with her!"

"Pig that he is!" I exclaimed; "sneak too! when he means to complain to my father to-morrow morning about my behaviour in church. I hope he won't, though, for I am out of Papa's good graces quite enough without that."

"Ask him not to, Winnie."

As Mr. Pinchley approached us, Ben whispered, "Look out for squalls Win! Breakers ahead! He's going to lecture you about church!"

"Ben," I replied, "I will be penitent. I don't want my dear father to be worried any more."

I thought I would forestall any hostile intentions by at once holding out a flag of truce; so I began with, "I know what you are going to tell the—I mean, my father—that I behaved badly in church last Sunday; and so I did. You are going to say that you hope it won't happen again; and so it won't—you will tell him that I ought to be ashamed of myself; and—well, yes, of course. And now, will you let it alone please?"

"Let what alone, my dear Miss Winnie?"

"Will you *not* speak to Papa?"

"What charming naïveté!" exclaimed the Curate, in a sort of rapture.

"Please to answer me," I persisted.

"—Say one word to your father that could annoy you?" he exclaimed. "My dear Miss Winnie, how little do you know me!"

He clasped his hands, and looked up for the moment, I thought, like one of those impossibly jointed saints, who lie upon their backs on the tombs in some of the old churches. Ben thought so too, for he gave me a little "dudge," and whispered, "St. Pinchley." Turning quickly aside to avoid laughing, I dropped a piece of buttered tea-cake (yclept Sally Lunn) butter downwards on to the splendid broadcloth clad knee beside me; his best party-going suit. We always had those same buttered condiments when we had a gathering of old ladies. They expected "Sally Lunns." Mr. Pinchley meekly gathered up the fragments of the buttery compound, and seemed no way put out. He resumed the conversation.

"I had really not observed anything deserving of censure in your conduct," he said, "but if I had done so, is it likely I should have mentioned it to your good father? I should have spoken to you on the subject. Far be it for me, to disturb so sacred a feeling as the affection of a parent for his children!"

I began to think a little better of him, and replied, "I am so glad! But then, what do you want to see Papa for to-morrow morning?"

He looked rather perplexed. Just then a move was made

for a round game. Ben suggested "Old Maid," but this proposal met with no favour. One of the old ladies, with a meaning glance at Aunt Jem, suggested "Matrimony," and we sat down at the table.

That game has always been, and must ever remain, an unsolved mystery to me; but the assembled guests seemed to be much interested in it, and when at last Mr. Pinchley had the king, and Aunt Jemima the queen, the delight was universal. After that, Miss Parsons played a sonata, and then she and Aunt Jemima performed a duet. But the grand performance of the evening was on the flute, played by Mr. Pinchley, who was accompanied on the piano by Aunt Jemima. Ben and I thought the piece of a decidedly wheezy character; nevertheless it was rapturously applauded and encored.

Then entered footmen, with trays, wine, cake, and other "condiments," as poor Ben called them. Finally all departed, protesting to Aunt Jemima that they had spent "a delightful evening."

CHAPTER IV.

"BROTHER," said Aunt Jemima, at breakfast next morning, "What a pity it was, you did not come into the drawing-room last night. We had such a pleasant evening."

"I went to bed, Jemima," Father replied; "a ride of twenty-two miles twice in the day, makes rest very acceptable."

"Where did you go, brother?"

"Ah!" Father quietly answered.

"Why not say?"

We both suspected he had gone to see the "horrid designing woman." Did Aunt Jemima suspect it too? Did she know anything about it?

As Papa made no reply, Aunt Jemima repeated the question.

"I went on business of my own," was his quiet rejoinder.

"Dear me! why make such mysteries, Brother? Is it anything you are ashamed of?" she demanded in a nettled tone of voice.

Father could be stern—yes, and determined too, now and then. He looked both, now, as he replied, "No, Jemima; I went to see a lady whom I am about to marry."

Aunt Jemima seemed to gasp for breath. A dreadful silence ensued; something like the awful hush and stillness that precedes a furious tempest.

"To—to—*what?*"

(The first symptom of the squall.)

"To *marry*," said Father.

"I don't believe it," from Aunt Jem.

"Don't, then!" from Father. Evidently he was waxing wroth.

Aunt Jemima prepared for battle.

"I can't believe it, Brother! That you, at your time of life, and with two helpless children dependent on you, should —should dream of—of—making such a fool of yourself!"

"Go on, Jemima, if it pleases you," said Father, in tones so aggravatingly cool, that Aunt Jemima's temper, never of the best, blazed out in full force.

"Yes, to think of *you—you*, who are quite an old man—to

think of *you*, dreaming of matrimony! And the woman who has so cleverly entrapped you, and who——"

"Stop!" shouted my father, fairly roused, "say what you like of *me;* but if you utter one syllable against the lady who is soon to bear my name, I shall be compelled to request your withdrawal from this house."

"Certainly, oh certainly!" exclaimed Aunt Jemima, rising in utter fury; "and I hope that when you have turned me out, you will not feel the pangs of a never-dying remorse! Far be it from me, Brother (here Aunt Jemima waxed pathetic, though still wrathful) to reproach you—(I never will)—far be it from me to remind you (I could not!) of the time when *you* and your little brothers and sisters were still younger and more helpless than these two children of yours; and I——"

"Yes, yes, Jemima," said Father. "Forgive me!—I was hasty. I never *could* forget how you acted a mother's part by us all. Do not let us quarrel, Jemima, after all these years."

"I am sure I only wish for peace, Brother," sighed Aunt Jemima; "I cannot imagine what I did to deserve all this."

"Well, Jemima," said Father, "I hope we shall never quarrel again. But I must have you understand—and Winnie and Ben must understand too, that I *am* going to marry this lady, and that nothing can possibly prevent it."

"Have I not done all that I could to make you comfortable, Brother?" she pleaded in injured tones.

"Indeed you have been most kind, Jemima."

"Then why such a change, Brother?"

"Well, Jemima, though you are such a good manager, and though you have always done your best to make me comfortable, there has been a great want of peace, in fact a constant vein of *discord* in the house, which has driven me elsewhere for quiet. Your perpetual bickerings with the children have been a source of constant discomfort."

"There, you naughty children!" exclaimed poor Aunt Jemima, turning fiercely upon us, "just see what you have driven your poor father to do!"

"'Tisn't *us!* Its *her*, Father!" cried Ben, pointing at Aunt Jemima, and impetuously regardless of grammar.

"Impertinent toad!" fulminated Aunt Jem.

"Not half such a toad as you!" said I, taking up the

cudgels for Ben; "I don't believe anyone *could* live with *you!* We don't quarrel with Miss Parsons!"

"Indeed, Miss Pert!" retaliated Aunt Jemima, "you forget that even now you are in a most unpleasant predicament. You quite forget that your *clergyman*, Miss, is coming by appointment this morning, to complain to your father of your disgraceful conduct in church!"

"*Is* he?" I cried. "Then you are wrong! He told me last night, that he had no intention of doing anything of the kind. So there!"

With this refined and well-bred speech I considered I had quelled Aunt Jem. Not a bit of it. She returned to the charge.

"Brother, did he not tell you he had something very important to communicate?" demanded Aunt Jem.

"He certainly did," replied Father; "but I do wish you would not persist in this dreadful dissension."

"Well Father," I interposed, "Mr. Pinchley told me, last night, that he did not intend, and had never intended, to make any complaints about me."

"Indeed!" mused our father. Then, as he glanced at Aunt Jem, an amused expression crept over his face.

"Ah!" he said, "I think I know."

"What, Brother?" asked Aunt Jem, her face flushing all over in a minute.

"Oh what fun!" whispered Ben into my ear, "the parson's going to pop. She'll be Mrs. Pinchley!"

"Rude boy! what are you whispering about?" sharply exclaimed Aunt Jemima.

Miss Parsons had been quiet, not saying a word; but she now suggested an adjournment to the school-room. Oh! that poor little woman! how we must have tried her with our want of application, our idleness, our utter disobedience through everything.

I had had to "coach up" (as I called it) those portions of English History which had been my daily task for the last week, and to give a verbal epitome of the whole.

"So then," I began, "Charles the First was to be married to Catherine of Arragon, and——"

"No, dear Winnie, that is all wrong. You are thinking of Henry the Eighth," said poor Miss Parsons.

"So I was, dear," said I. "Then who in the world could

Henry the Eighth have married? There's a wasp! Hit it Ben."

Ben sprung up.

"Keep still, Ben," said Miss Parsons; "they never sting unless you interfere with them."

"Oh yes, indeed they do," I said; "I heard of a young man swallowing one in a glass of beer, and it worked all through his flesh, and caused dreadful swellings, and came out of his knee at last. Only fancy!"

"No Winnie," said Ben, "it wasn't a young man; it was a young woman; and it was a needle, and not a wasp——"

"So it was, Ben; but I do remember that a young man——"

"Winnie, go on with your history," put in Miss Parsons.

"Now, who did Charles the First marry?"

"Oh! I remember all about it now! It was the poor Queen of Scots, and he enticed her into a place called Farthingale Castle, and blew her up one night——"

"Oh dear no, Winnie, I see that you have forgotten all about Charles the First, so you must learn that again. We must go back to Henry the Eighth."

"I remember all about him now," said Ben; "don't you remember, Win, he reminded us of Blue Beard, and——"

"Yes, yes," I cried, "he had six wives (how stupid of me not to remember it sooner! Thank you, Ben dear)—six wives, Miss Parsons dear, and one of them was that poor dear Queen of Scots, and the other was good Queen Bess, and he beheaded—no, did he Ben? Yes, he *did* behead the poor dear beautiful Queen of Scots; but ugly old Queen Bess survived him (or was it Queen Anne—or perhaps bloody Mary?) Dear Miss Parsons, perhaps I had better just look through that part again? Hallo! there comes Pinchley!" and with one bound I was peering through the window.

"Winnie! Winnie! how *can* you!" said poor Miss Parsons, "do not let Mr. Pinchley see you."

"He's come to pop! he's come to pop!" cried Ben in convulsions of delight.

"To do *what*, dear?" asked Miss Parsons.

"To pop to Aunt Jemmy!" laughed Ben. "Oh, I hope he will! What fun the wedding will be!"

"S-s-s-s-h!" I said, softly opening the door, and stealing out on to the landing, to watch the entrance of the Curate.

"Come in, do, Winnie!" pleaded Miss Parsons, trying to drag me back; an utterly futile attempt, as I was much the stronger.

"Yes, he's gone into Father's sanctum, Ben dear!" I whispered.

"Winnie, you *shall* come in!" said Miss Parsons, so decidedly, that rather than vex that "dear old darling," I complied.

The geography lesson now came on. "How many counties are there in England?"

"Fifty-two, dear," I replied, with happy assurance.

"No Winnie," said little Ben—four; Ulster, Leinster, Connaught, and Munster."

"Oh dear! dear! dear!" sighed Miss Parsons.

"What a yarn they *are* spinning!" I exclaimed, for I could hear the Curate and Papa talking. Father's "den" was beneath the school-room.

"There's Vixen going to kill a bird!" screamed Ben, as he dashed down the staircase, through the hall, and into the garden, I after him. We saved the bird, and returned to the school-room. Miss Parsons then turned towards us, looking really angry.

"Winnie," she began, in stern accents.

"You are a dear!" I interrupted, giving her a sounding kiss.

"Ben!" she attempted.

"There never was such a darling in all the world! I *must* marry you," cried Ben.

"*Will* you be good children?" asked Miss Parsons.

"Yes dear, indeed we will," I replied. "Ben, let us sit down and plod till luncheon—shall we?"

"Yes," said Ben, with a deep-drawn sigh.

So down we sat, and plodded hard through the mazes of Greek and Roman History for about an hour, our dreary monotonous way being only varied by occasional sighs and yawns. I sat with my elbows planted on the table, my chin propped up by my hands, my hair thrown back as far as possible from my face. Ben's attitude was almost the counterpart of mine. Oh! why was it so hot? and why did all those horrid Roman and Grecian people ever live? and we, longing to be out in the cool shade somewhere. "Hallo!" cried Ben suddenly, "Pinchley is going!"

Evidently there was a move in the room below; for we heard first one chair and then the other pushed back.

"Win, do you think old Jem will wear a veil, or a bonnet?" asked Ben, "and will the cake be a big one?"

"Oh Ben, *will* she have bridesmaids? and *will* she ask me to be one? I have never been a bridesmaid, you know!"

"Goodbye, goodbye," Papa was saying below; "yes, I will tell her." And Mr. Pinchley left.

"Did you hear that, Miss Parsons, dear?" I asked; "Pinchley is going to pop by deputy."

"Oh Winnie, do not be so vulgar! Besides, you both promised to plod!"

"And haven't we, dear? I am sure I feel perfectly sea-sick with plodding, and Ben does too."

"Steward, a ba-a-a-sin!" cried Ben.

Miss Parsons saw that further coercion was useless; so she shut the books.

We were about rushing away, when Papa's footsteps were heard mounting the stairs, and the next moment he opened the door.

"Winnie," he said, rather gravely, "come down to my study; I have something to say to you."

"Nasty old sneak!" I thought, mentally apostrophising the Curate, "he *has* been complaining of me after all!"

Dear Father took me into his study, and then closed the door. He was very grave, and a little sad. I was afraid I was going to cry.

"My child, you have no idea what Mr. Pinchley came for," he began.

"Yes indeed Father," I replied, my lip trembling, my face all a-quiver. We loved him so, we could not bear to see him vexed.

"What do you think he came for, darling?" asked dear Father, drawing me to his knee.

I fairly gave way at this, and broke into sobs.

"Hush! Winnie dear, you couldn't help it, you know," said father.

"Oh yes, I could! I *could* have kept quiet; and so I did, last Sunday, because I didn't want to vex you, Papa."

"You are mistaken, dear," said Father, smoothing my ruffled hair; "have you *no* idea why Mr. Pinchley wanted to see me alone?"

"Just to pop for Aunt Jemima," I sobbed, "and to get me into trouble about church, to please her, the nasty old sneak! when he promised—promised—prom—." And off I went afresh.

"Nonsense, Winnie, nothing of the sort! Mr. Pinchley came here to—to make you an offer of marriage."

"Me? me?" I was utterly bewildered, dazed, stupefied.

"Yes dear, you; not your Aunt Jemima."

"You must be mistaken, Father dear. Why, I am a child! Aunt Jemima is a woman. It *must* be Aunt Jemima, and you have misunderstood Pinchley."

"No, my dear; Pinch—I mean Mr. Pinchley—mentioned you by name, and expressed himself unmistakeably."

"What horrid impertinence!" was my ungrateful rejoinder. "The idea of his daring——." I was choking with disgust and indignation.

"Yet my dear, you saw no impertinence in his proposing for your Aunt," said Father, with a lurking smile.

"But Aunt Jemima likes all that low sort of people."

"Hush Winnie, hush!" said Father.

"Papa, you *must* be mistaken!" I urged. "Now tell me what he said. How did he begin?"

"Well, dear, he began with, 'A fine day for the crops, Mr. Travers?' He appeared nervous, you know, dear."

"What next, Father?"

"He seemed to hesitate so much, that I thought to help him by asking why he had wished to see me."

"Yes, Father, and what then?"

"Then he said, 'I have come, Mr. Travers, to ask your leave to pay my addresses to your daughter Winifred."

"Nasty crawling thing! But oh Papa, are you *quite* sure he did not say 'your sister Jemima'?"

"Quite sure, Winnie. I was so utterly taken aback, that words failed me for a few minutes; so he added 'your sweet child Winifred.'"

"Papa, *did* you knock him down?"

"My dear child! how can you be so absurd? When a man offers to make a woman his wife, he pays her the very highest compliment!"

I could have cried with vexation. It was so dreadfully humiliating to think that this seal-like, flabby creature, as I considered him, had dared to think of me in this way.

"What did you say next, Father?"

"Well dear, I told him how completely he had taken me by surprise. I said I had been under the impression that he preferred your aunt Jemima."

"Of course Papa, of course. Well?"

"He replied, "Oh no! estimable as that lady is, deeply as I respect her, I have regarded her only as the aunt of your charming daughter Winifred!'"

"Oh dear! oh dear! Papa, what will Aunt Jemima say? Please, don't tell her!"

"Then," pursued Father, "Mr. Pinchley went on to say, that he was extremely grieved to think that I imagined he had any other feelings towards your aunt, than of deep respect for a lady, his superior in age and goodness. And then he dwelt on your 'charming frankness' (which is often rudeness, my dear), your 'innocence and beauty' (you would not be bad looking, child, if your hair and dress were in better order), but I don't think you can be called 'a beauty!'"

"I should think not!" I indignantly exclaimed. "Papa, *was* he sober? You know when young Jack Higgins has a 'drop too much,' as those people call it (but I should say a great many 'drops too much'), he talks in the most stupid way."

"Oh, hush child! You must not speak so! Of course that is out of the question," said Papa, looking very much shocked.

"Well Papa, what was the end of it?"

"I promised to speak to you, dear."

"Oh! that's it, is it? Then Papa, please to tell him, that he is an insolent rascal, to make such a proposal to a child like me. I suppose I shall have to marry some day, because every one does, but I need not think of it for years and years, need I? And if I must marry, he shall be a *gentleman*, at all events!"

"Well child, go and play now; Ben is waiting for you."

And so this remarkable interview ended.

CHAPTER V.

"GOODNESS gracious!" said Ben, when I had related to him the substance of my conversation with Father.

"And what provokes me, Ben, is, that Father didn't knock him down!"

"Oh! if I were a man!" cried Ben, savagely clenching his fist.

"But," said I, "what would Aunt Jemima say? Mind Ben, you must not let it out!"

"Not I," said Ben, "unless I'm driven to it."

"But you mustn't be driven to it, Ben dear; promise me."

"Very well," said Ben.

At luncheon Aunt Jemima was evidently in a flutter of expectation. Had she, too, imagined the Curate's visit bore reference to her? My father's manner was more tender and loving than usual, and, as he left the room, he laid his hand on my head in passing, and murmured, "Poor little Winnie."

Was it, that he lamented the time had come, when I was passing from the child into the woman?

But I felt a child still—every bit a child, and a most disorderly one too. Never had my "mane" been more tumbled, my dress more torn, my hands more tanned and scratched, than they were that summer afternoon, when, four o'clock having struck, Ben and I rushed off for our "rampage" (as he called it) along the walks, up and down the slopes, and into the beech wood.

"Oh, how pleasant it is to be alive, and to be children, Ben!" I exclaimed, flinging myself down at the foot of a great beech tree, whose huge branches cast a delicious shadow around, till it was met by the shade of another, and another, and another. Oh! to feel cool at last, and to be rid of all those horrid Greek and Roman people, not to mention Henry the Eighth and his wives!

"Ben," I said, "we'll never marry—you and I; you suit me, and I suit you. Some day, when we are old enough, we will set out on our travels."

"Oh! how jolly!" said Ben.

"I don't know that we will emigrate," I mused, "as nurse says it is not comfortably managed; but we can travel very pleasantly, with all the money we shall have saved up by that time."

"Yes Winnie dear, and then I shall be big, and able to fight, if anyone attacks us."

"Yes dear, you had better practice your fighting whenever you have the chance. You never know how soon you may want it."

And so we chatted on, till the sound of the dressing bell reminded us that it was time to return, which we did, slowly and reluctantly. We were close to the house, when the gardener's boy came up to us. He had something in a cloth; something alive, wriggling and struggling.

"What's that, Bill?" we both asked.

"I shouldn't have done it, Miss, without asking of you," pleaded Bill.

"Done what?" I cried, my soul filled with dire foreboding. "What is it?"

"It's the kitten, Miss. I was told for to drownd it."

"Oh!" shrieked Ben and I in a breath, as we seized the bundle, and released the hapless kitten, who scampered away into the house.

"I wouldn't have done it—I wouldn't indeed Miss Winnie and Master Ben, not for ever so, without first asking you, and I've been looking for you for more than a 'our, but I thought if I didn't take the kitten, she'd a'drownd it herself."

"She!" I exclaimed, "who?"

"Your Haunt, Miss," said Bill.

"Did *she* tell you to drown it?—the darling, precious kitten?" I cried.

"Yes, Miss, and she said she'd give me sixpence," said Bill.

"I will give you half-a-crown Bill! and Ben will give you another. We have plenty of money! We are rich!" I exclaimed, swelling in the pride of wealth.

"Oh! what larks!" said Ben. "Now Bill, don't you say a word to Aunt Jemima. Let her think you have drowned the kitten. Now mind, if you tell, I'll thrash you!"

"Yes Master Ben, I won't tell nothing," said Bill.

"Winnie, let us catch kittums and shut her up with Vixen

in your room, with lots of food and milk, so that old Jem may think it's drowned," said Ben.

"Yes, Ben, but why?"

"Then we'll wait till she has gone to bed, and then she'll see the kitten's ghost," said Ben.

"—Dream of it, do you mean dear?" I asked.

"No, *see* it. We must make up something like a kitten, and hang it to the top of her bed by two strings, in such a way, that by cutting one string and leaving the other, the hind legs of the kitten will fall, but the kitten will be hanging by the neck, and of course will twirl round and round over Aunt Jem."

"Capital!" I assented; "but who is to cut the string?"

"*You*, Winnie. Hide yourself in the big chest in her dressing-room; and after she is in bed and has put out her light, creep along on all-fours and cut the string."

"Suppose she sees the kitten, slung to the top of the bed?"

"She can't; the draperies make too much shadow."

"But if she does?"

"Well, it can't be helped."

"How shall I get out of the room, Ben?"

"Through the dressing-room again; she always leaves that window open, and you can slip down the ivy, and I will run in through the kitchen, and we will get to our rooms by the back stairs. Then we can hear the fun from our windows."

"How splendid!" I exclaimed. Catching the kitten and Vixen, and consigning them to prison, was hardly accomplished when the dinner bell rang.

"Oh Nurse! Nurse!" I cried, as she came into my room to get me ready for dinner, "*can't* you tell the cook to keep back the dinner for *five* minutes? I'll tell you why presently. I shall catch it so, if I am not down."

Good old Nurse trotted off to tell the cook; who sent word to Aunt Jem that the soot had come down the chimney, and spoilt the white sauce, which would delay the dinner a little. Whilst nurse was hurrying on my toilet, I told her about the attempted massacre of the kitten, and how we intended to avenge it.

"And serve her right, the nasty old thing!" commented nurse; "she hasn't a bit of feeling for anything but her own whims and cranks. All those old maids are the same."

"Oh no, Nurse," I remonstrated, "some ladies who don't

marry, are such dears! There is Miss Parsons now, and Miss Chippitt, and oh!—there is Miss Gascoign! I hope I shall never marry; and when I am old I'll try to be like Miss Gascoign."

"There! now you are ready; run along and make haste, there's a dear, and do try to be good," pleaded Nurse, who still considered me a very little child.

"And Nurse, you will lock up Vixen and kittums, and not let anyone have the key?"

"No, I'll do your room myself, dear; so run along."

Aunt Jem was very quiet throughout dinner. Long afterwards, I learnt that she had told Father, "she had overheard Mr. Pinchley ask him to tell her something, and perhaps he had forgotten it."

"No," Father had replied, "I never forget to deliver messages."

"I thought it might perhaps be something about some case of distress," faltered Aunt Jem.

"No," Father had said, "the message was not to her at all."

"Indeed!" Aunt Jem had exclaimed, all her curiosity aroused, "Then to whom was it?"

"Quite another person," was my father's dry response.

"Anyone I know?" persisted Aunt Jemima.

"Ask Pinchley," was the reply, and that was all she could get out of him. Retiring to her chamber to muse over this apparent mystery, she had found the hapless kitten soundly sleeping on her snowy coverlet. This discovery had aroused the smouldering fire of her wrath into flames of fury. Hence the order for the wretched intruder's execution.

"Where can the kitten be? and Vixen too!" I said. "George, have you seen it lately?"

"No Miss, not since this morning."

"Miss Parsons, dear, have *you* seen it?" I asked.

"No, I think not," she replied.

"Oh! I *do* hope no harm has befallen it!" I exclaimed. "I hope it has not fallen into the pond."

"I hope not, indeed," said Father, who was fond of animals, and had a great liking for little kittums; "I should be very much vexed. George, send some one to look for it, and let me know when it is found."

"You would be sorry if it were drowned, wouldn't you Papa?" asked little Ben.

"Yes, dear, I should," answered Father. "I like the poor harmless little thing."

"How *can* people drown kittens?" I exclaimed.

We soon adjourned to the drawing-room. When tea was brought in, Papa again asked about the kitten.

"We have not seen it sir," said George.

"Very strange indeed!" said Father. "Do kittens usually disappear in this way."

"No sir," replied George, "I've never heard tell of such a thing."

"Has the pond been searched?"

"Yes, sir, and the kitten is not there."

Aunt Jemima was growing more and more uncomfortable.

Everybody subsided into books, or something. Miss Parsons tooted on the piano. Towards bed-time, Ben and I slipped up stairs, and arranged the apparatus. A fur cuff, cut into strips, and sewn round a piece of wadding, for a body; a sable tail, off a boa; a potatoe for a face; four stuffed fingers of a glove for legs. In the moonlight it was the very counterpart of the supposed-to-be defunct kitten. This formidable being was suspended by two strings to the top of Aunt Jem's four-post bed, and towards the foot thereof, in such manner, that it would dangle between her and the moonlit window facing her. One string ran through the chest of the ghost, the other ran through its hind quarters. The first string was a fixture, the other was merely used as a sling or stay, to lash the being up to the chintz till after Aunt Jem was in bed. When all was ready, Ben got on Aunt Jem's bed, and lay down in her place. I crept out from the dressing-room on all-fours. It was a rehearsal. Ben gave a snore, in imitation of Aunt Jemima's supposed slumbers. I mewed in exact imitation of kittums. Ben pretended to awake. I softly raised my hand, undid the "aft mainstay" as we called it, and down came the kitten's hind quarters with an awful swoop. There was a sway or two, and then the corpse began to twirl slowly round and round.

"What does it look like?" I whispered.

"Horrid!" said Ben. "Do look at it."

And it *did* look "horrid," twirling round and round, and then untwirling in the opposite direction, like a roasting jack; all seen so distinctly against the moonlight.

"It will do!" I said; "now let us strap it up again."

And so we did, and then ran down in time for prayers. That solemnity over, we children were sent to bed; but as nurse was in the secret, there was no fear.

Ben and I crept into Aunt Jem's dressing-room. I got into the large chest, which did not "close with a spring." Ben was on watch in the bed-room.

"She's coming!" at last he whispered.

I closed the lid of my retreat, just as Ben slipped out of the window. With my roof a little ajar, I could hear him go rustling down through the ivy branches.

It felt very odd, being there. I kept the lid of the chest a little open, with a small piece of wood I had brought for the purpose. I thought oysters and various kinds of shell fish must feel very much as I did then; only that they had no Aunt Jemima. I heard her take off her garments one by one. I knew that she would soon be in bed. She had a habit of talking aloud to herself; she began now.

"Yes, I am sorry! But it was so provoking to find the nasty thing with its nasty fleas on my bed! Then, I was so upset by what Brother had said about Mr. Pinchley. What can it be, this message? Have I been deceived in thinking—ah me! After all these years, am I to suffer again."

I began to feel very uncomfortable. This enforced eavesdropping was galling to me. Also, I began to pity Aunt Jemima, and to wonder whether we had not behaved shamefully to her. She resumed.

"And those unmannerly children are enough to provoke a saint. Brother *shall* send them to school!" (my compunctious visitings evaporated). "Horrid children! How I hate children and cats!"

She had finished brushing her teeth, and had placed them in a tumbler for the night. I thought she would soon be in bed now. To my horror she wandered into the dressing-room and looked out of the window.

"Ah! a sweet night!" she murmured, sitting down upon my temporary retreat, "a lovely moon! How it seems to awake all those long-forgotten tender feelings which——" she paused. "Ah Anselm!" (Pinchley's christian name.)

I began to have dreadful recollections of how nuns had been walled up alive, and how the young bride in the story of "the Mistletoe Bough" had perished in the old oak chest. Would she *never* get off my roof?

She did. I gently opened my shell, and breathed again. She was leaving the dressing-room.

One stocking off, then the other.

A creaking of wood, a fluffy creak, as of a bed subsiding on to wood, a contented long-drawn sigh from Aunt Jemima.

Darkness.

Gently, I raised the lid, up, up, up, till it rested against the wall. I sat upright in the chest, and listened. I heard a kind of little suppressed squeak of laughter at the window beside me. There was Ben's face peering in.

Aunt Jemima's voice was uplifted in prayer. Evidently something was on her conscience, and stood between her and sleep. This same something had made her afraid to say her prayers out of bed. Equally afraid was she to sleep without offering up her "evening sacrifice." She compromised the matter by doing so in bed.

"Yes, I do confess—it is useless to deny it—that I *did* order that kitten to be drowned. I ought not to have done it, I know; but then, its nasty fleas! Grant that I may see no dreadful apparition to-night, and I will read the Bible for two hours to-morrow to old deaf Mrs. Price. And that is always a trying ordeal!"

Silence. No doubt her thoughts wandered far away from deaf old Mrs. Price; for her next words bore no reference to that aged incumbrance.

"Yes, I *did* think—his manner has been so tenderly respectful. I *did* hope—I do!"

Another silence. Then a long one. Then a—yes, decidedly, a snore!

The time had come! On hands and knees I gained the bedside.

"Me-e-e-e-w! Me-e-e-e-w! Me-e-e-e-w! Me-e-e-e-w!"

Aunt Jem woke.

"M-E-E-E-E-E-W!"

And down came the kitten.

What followed, frightened even us. Such yells, as I should never have thought could have issued from human lungs. As quickly as possible, I crawled along the floor, gained the dressing-room, and, helped by Ben, made my exit through the window, slipped down the ivy, and, re-entering the house by the back way, was soon in my own room, which was over

Aunt Jemima's. Ben's being next to mine, by leaning out of our two windows we could talk to each other.

Aunt Jemima's screams were still going on. The whole house was raised. We were frightened.

"It will all be discovered!" I said; "shan't we catch it."

We heard Miss Parsons and nurse enter Aunt Jemima's room. A little later, poor Papa, having donned some garments, went to the door.

"There now, there," we heard nurse say, "now, don't take on so, there's a dear lady! It's a dream you've had ma'am."

"Nightmare!" timidly suggested Miss Parsons.

"The salmon and the cowkimber, ma'am," said cook, who had by this time joined the party. "Depend upon it, its the salmon and cowkimber, ma'am."

"I saw it! I saw it!" cried Aunt Jemima.

"The salmon, ma'am; yes of course," said cook.

"Not at all!" tartly exclaimed Aunt Jemima, "there was no salmon."

"What was it, then?" asked cook.

"A ghost!" shuddered Aunt Jemima; "a fearful ghost! Ah!—" Another shriek, "there it is still."

Cook looked in the direction pointed out by Aunt Jem, and exclaiming, "Sure enough there *is* something here!" advanced a step, and coolly grasped the apparition.

"Why, its a rabbit! or is it the kitten?" she asked, as, taking a pair of scissors from a side table, she cut down the object of so much discussion.

"Ben," I whispered, "tumble into bed, and be fast asleep. They are sure to suspect *us*."

We both "tumbled in" forthwith; and when Papa came to our room, no answer save loud breathing was vouchsafed to his tap at our doors.

But Father was not deceived, for all that.

CHAPTER VI.

GRIM and solemn were two of the faces at the breakfast table next morning. Father's was solemn—portentously so. Aunt Jem's was grim beyond expression.

Had we known how solemn our dear father would have looked, we should not have attempted to carry out the little practical joke, intended to be the sequel to last night's performance. A covered dish was in front of Aunt Jemima; a piece of stick inserted under the edge of the cover, tilted it up on one side.

"Why is this stick placed here? What is there under the cover, George?" asked Aunt Jem.

"Mushrooms and bacon ma'am," replied that unconscious domestic.

The cover was lifted. A shriek and a jump from Aunt Jem, as from out of it sprang kittums. Splash he went through her tea, and then over her shoulder, when he became lost to view.

"Then the poor little thing must have been there all night," said dear innocent Father.

"No Brother, nothing of the sort," exclaimed Aunt Jemima, in direst wrath; "it is a low trick played by your unmannerly children at my expense! How long will you suffer me to be insulted in your house?"

Our father's brow grew black as night. For a moment he glanced at us; then he rang the bell.

"George," he asked, "how did the kitten get under that cover?"

I saw that poor George had his strong suspicions. His face and voice were a painful mixture of suppressed laughter and respectful terror, as he replied, "I don't know sir, I really don't know. I saw Mrs. Stevens put on the cover sir, and the kitten was not under it then."

"Tell Mrs. Stevens to come here," said Father, still with the same black cloud upon his brow.

That functionary came bustling in, red, fussy, and excited.

"I'm sure sir, I don't know *how* the kitten came there.

I sent the dish out of the kitchen, full of mushrooms and bacon, and—my! this isn't the same dish! Why *where* is the dish I sent in?"

At this crisis Miss Parsons came to the rescue.

"Is *that* it?" she asked, pointing to the sofa, under which Vixen and Pearl were quietly regaling themselves upon something.

"Yes, that's it!" cried cook, capturing the missing crockery; "and here's the rest of the mushrooms and bacon."

"That will do; I understand," said poor Father. The servants left the room. With trembling hearts, we prepared for the storm which we knew must follow.

"Winnie—Ben," said Father, more coldly and sternly than I had ever heard him speak, "what have you to say in your defence?"

We were silent for a moment; then I stood up, and, with my voice shaking a little, replied, "Father, we have perhaps done wrong, but not so wrong as you think."

"What have you to say in your defence?" again asked Father.

"Father, dear, isn't the kitten a poor harmless, helpless little thing? Aren't you fond of it?"

"Certainly," said Father; "but what has that to do with it?"

"Suppose Ben or I were to drown it, Father, would you not be angry?"

"Angry? I should think so! But what has that to do with it?"

"If Miss Parsons were to order it to be drowned, Papa?" I asked, approaching the truth with much subtlety.

"Miss Parsons is utterly incapable of such an act of unnecessary cruelty; nor would she take upon herself to destroy anything belonging to another."

"Father, if one of the servants ordered Bill to drown the kitten, what would you do?"

"I should immediately dismiss that servant," said Father.

Aunt Jem began to feel uncomfortable. She guessed what would be the next question, for she interposed at this crisis.

"What a fuss about the kitten!" she exclaimed; "why, whole litters of kittens are drowned every day, and nothing is thought of it!"

"No," replied Father, "because it is necessary to drown

the poor little things. I think, if one could be certain of a good home for every kitten or puppy that comes into the world, one would never think of drowning them; but as it unfortunately happens that more kittens are born than can be accommodated in good homes, in common mercy they must be destroyed."

"Yes, Brother," eagerly interposed Aunt Jemima, "therefore, why all this fuss about one wretched little kitten, when so many are destroyed every day without any fuss at all?"

"You miss the point Jemima," he gravely argued. "This kitten *has* a comfortable home. Moreover, as it has a recognised place in the household, if anyone were to attempt to injure it, I should demand an account from that person."

Poor Father! how he went blundering on, only bent on carrying out one of his pet hobbies—kindness to animals.

"You are all in league against me!" was Aunt Jemima's passionate outcry.

We all stared at each other. What had poor Father done, to deserve this accusation?"

"What has Father done?" I exclaimed.

"Ah indeed!" added Ben, "its *us*, not *him!*"

"What does it all mean?" cried our poor perplexed father.

He looked so dreadfully pained, nervous, and altogether distressed, that I said, "Father dear, shall we tell you exactly all about it, from beginning to end."

"Certainly Winnie—certainly."

"Then this is how it happened, Papa. Ben and I were out in the wood yesterday afternoon, and the first dinner bell rang; so we were running home to dress, when, near the house, we met Bill with the kitten in a bag, and he was going to drown it, and Aunt Jemima had promised him sixpence to do it, and we gave him five shillings for not having done it (being a good boy and kind, you know, Papa dear), and we hid the kitten away, with Vixen to take care of it, and plenty of milk and meat and fish for Vixen, and then we made up something to look like the dear precious kitten's ghost (oh! to think it *might* have been its ghost!) to frighten Aunt Jemima, because we thought she deserved it. Oh! to think, that if Bill had been a cruel boy, the precious kitten would have been *really* dead now!" And here my pride forsook me, and as the image of the dear imaginary defunct

arose before my mind's eye, my eloquence came to an untimely end, and terminated in a passionate flood of childish tears.

"Jemima," asked Father very quietly, "is there any mistake here? Has not Bill mistaken your orders? Is it true?"

"It is true, Brother," replied Aunt Jem.

"Children," said poor dear Father, looking very white, "I do not blame you."

"Then Brother, you blame *me!*" angrily persisted Aunt Jem.

"I have not said so, Jemima," was our father's mild answer.

"Brother, you are ruining those children! They will live to be your curse!"

We turned towards him in mute appeal, and met *such* a look from him! Sometimes, on an early summer morning, there has been a melting dewy look upon the grass and flowers and shrubs, that has reminded me of that look upon our father's face, as he answered, "Hitherto they have been my blessing!" and then, unworthy as we were, we sprang into his arms, and were happy.

But I turned round upon Aunt Jemima, and said, "How dare you try to set our father against us! our darling father, that we love more than all the world!"

Then Ben, flaming with wrath and fury, added, "You are spiteful against Winnie, and want to get her sent to school, because she is so pretty, and your precious Pinchley wants to marry her!"

"*What?*" shrieked poor Aunt Jem, turning as white as a sheet.

"Yes," said Ben, "the nasty pig dared to 'pop' for Winnie to Papa only yesterday."

"Is it true Brother?" faltered Aunt Jemima.

"Yes Jemima," replied Papa very sadly.

Aunt Jemima left the room without another word.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT afternoon we were busily engaged in playing at the noble game of "duck and drake" by the river side, when a boat, pulled by a strong pair of arms, came round the corner, straight to where we were.

"Oh! jolly!" we exclaimed in a breath, "it's Mr. Gascoign."

"Yes, no less a personage," he replied; "come back last night to chastise all refractory subjects. And how are you bairns? and what mischief have you been up to all the time I've been away?"

While he had been speaking he had been shipping his oars; he now moored the boat, and we saw that he had not been its sole occupant. Besides the small silky spaniel which accompanied him everywhere, there was a child, rolled up in a rug, whom the Rector now took into his arms and brought to shore. It was little Sally Wright.

"Fine doings here since I went away, it seems," continued the Rector, "the children have taken to throwing themselves into the water. How many of such suicides have there been, do you know bairn?" addressing Ben. "Well, I must carry her home first, and whip her afterwards."

"May we come with you?" we both asked.

"Oh yes, if you please, come by all means; and mind, Winnie, I predict that her mother will first kiss and lament over this fragment, and then shake and beat it."

All which came to pass.

Mrs. Wright had evidently missed the small three-year-old, and was now standing outside her cottage door, looking wildly in every direction, ever and anon lifting up her voice in a shrill cry of "*Salleeee!*"

"Here she is! I have her," shouted the Rector. "She's been in the river!"

Mrs. Wright seized the small bundle of humanity and smothered it with kisses.

"She would have been drowned but for my boat," said the Rector.

"Oh, you naughty wicked girl!" exclaimed the mother,

forthwith proceeding to shake and slap the small delinquent, "don't you dare ever to set foot a nighst that there river again, that's all!"

Prolonged howls from Sally were her only reply.

"Well, well, don't scold the poor little thing; but dry her well, wrap her in hot flannels, put her to bed, and give her a cup of warm milk."

"So I will sir. Come along with mother, my lamb. Don't cry no more now, there's a good maid," said Mrs. Wright, relapsing into the affectionate.

We had gone but a few steps farther on, when we heard Mrs. Wright's voice uplifted, "God bless you, Sir!"

The blessing of the poor followed Mr. Gascoign wherever he went.

We came to a cottage where a slatternly looking woman was shelling peas on a low stool outside the door. Three slatternly looking children were sprawling on the ground engaged in a desultory fashion in the languid manufacture of mud pies. A slatternly looking pig was stretched upon its side close at hand, emitting ever and anon a lazy grunt of satisfaction at the mere fact of its existence. The very poultry, poor tattered things! had a slatternly, uncared-for look. A blazing sun was grilling hotly down upon the group. On our approach the lady of the family arose, laid down the bowl of peas at sight of the Rector, and, crossing her hands in front, assumed a sanctimonious expression of countenance.

"Good day to you Mrs. Jones. Fine hot weather."

"Ah yes sir," with a sigh; "very trying to us poor folks that have got to work so hard. But if it's the Lord's will we will thank him for it."

"Of course—of course," said the Rector; "but if you feel the heat so much, I wonder you sit out here in this blazing sun, instead of inside. The children too—it is enough to give them fever!"

"Get up you little dirty brats!" cried the maternal creature, addressing the poor little mud-larks, "get up and make your obedience to Mr. Gascoign." And she hauled up one poor repulsive little object after another, by the arm, and, giving each a rough shake, set it down with almost force enough to dislocate its ankles.

"I do believe there never was such aggravating brats as

these!" she viciously pursued, "do what I will there's no keeping of 'em clean."

"Poor little things," said the Rector, "if you sent them to school they would be taken care of, and out of your way, and would learn something to be of use to them in life."

"Ah yes sir; I *do* send 'em to Sunday school, and they learns such sweet hymns, sech as 'I'm a little sinful child,' and 'Ot is the 'ell prepared for me!' It do turn one quite inside out to hear 'em, and makes one feel very thankful to the Lord!"

"Have those hymns been taught in the school while I have been away?" asked the Rector rather quickly.

"Oh yes, sir; Mr. Pinchley is full of zeal for the Lord."

"Umph!" said Mr. Gascoign, writing something in his note book.

"I 'umbly ask your parden sir, for not asking you to walk in, but the room is that smoky as never was. That chimbly *do* smoke sir! I've prayed to the Lord to stop its smoking, and I can't do no more."

"What's the use of 'praying to the Lord' about it?" indignantly responded Mr. Gascoign. "The Lord is not a chimney sweep! Send for the sweep, Mrs. Jones. Much better than 'praying to the Lord!'"

"Well sir, if you think it will be better, I'll send for the sweep."

"Bless me!" quoth the Rector, "how poor your fowls look! They always appear to be moulting!"

"And so they are sir; I can't think what ails 'em. I suppose its the Lord's will they should be always moulting."

"I know something about poultry," said Mr. Gascoign. "Let me look at your fowl house." And, without waiting for an invitation, he walked round to the back premises. One glance was enough.

"Now, before you pray to the Lord any more about your fowls, just try and do His will a little more. Clean out your fowl-house well. Scrub and scour every bit of it. Re-gravel the floor. Then pray to the Lord to send His blessing on it, and you will do well. At present, your fowls are eaten up by vermin."

"Well, you ought to know best, sir, but as He sends the vermin, don't you think (if I may make so bold as to ask you sir) they are all God's creatures, and ought to be let be?"

"By no means, Mrs. Jones. They are 'matter in the wrong place.' But perhaps you don't quite understand that?'"

"Not quite sir."

"Well I will try to explain it. God sends lions and tigers, and they are in the right place in their own forests, and would be in the wrong place in our streets—eh?"

"Sure enough they would sir. Well, I'll clean the fowl house, and perhaps the Lord will send his blessing."

"You'll have plenty of eggs, depend upon it, if you do," laughed the Rector, as he turned to go.

"Well pets," he continued, as he walked on, "what have you been about during my absence! No good I'll be bound!"

So then we told him about the "hair soup," and the kitten's ghost; at each of which narrations he tried to look grave, but ended by laughing. At last he said, "But children, you must not be too hard on your aunt. If you knew what her life has been, you would not wonder if she is now and then rather acidulated."

"But some people seem to grow kinder and more tender hearted through trouble," I remonstrated.

"Yes, and then they are as gentle and kindly and sweet as the summer dew."

"Why don't all people bear trouble in that way?" I asked. "At all events everyone would love them, and that would be *some* amends for all their troubles."

"Because some can't. All people are not alike. Some natures are so stubborn, that they won't submit to trouble; they rebel against it, think themselves ill-used, and turn hard and bitter, and go through the rest of their lives with their hand against every man, and every man's hand against them. They are dreadfully unhappy, and sadly, sadly to be pitied."

"Oh poor Aunt Jemima!" exclaimed Ben, "don't let us tease her any more, shall we Winnie?"

"No, indeed dear," I replied.

"Hallo, what's this?" exclaimed the Rector, as we came upon something by the road side,—a cart overturned in a ditch, a donkey unharnessed standing beside it, and an old man sitting on the ground.

"Why daddy, how did this happen?" asked the Rector.

"Wheel come'd off, sir," replied the old man in doleful accents.

"How long have you been sitting here?" asked the Rector, examining the maimed vehicle.

"Most two hours, sir. Mr. Pinchley he come by an 'our and a 'arf agone, and he said as how he'd send some one; but nobody's been."

"Now let me see," mused the Rector. "Here Daddy, lend a hand. There now, yo ho! heave!" and the cart was out of the ditch.

"Now then, I think I can cook up this refractory wheel; at least, well enough to trundle home with. I've been fishing you know, and there was a screw-loose in the boat, so I took a hammer and nails, and other things, to do a little carpentering. Lucky for me and for you; for we should have had to get the cart home somehow between us; but now Neddy can do it."

And so, with a little cleverness and management, the Rector made a fine job of it; and ere long, the donkey was harnessed to the cart, and the old man went off in triumph.

"Oh, please Mr. Gascoign, do come and see poor old Betty. She was dreadfully upset by one of Mr. Pinchley's sermons; but she wants to know whether there are pigs in heaven," I pleaded.

"Pigs in heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Gascoign. "I hope not! But I will come and hear what she has to say."

Betsey was dreadfully poor, but her place was always scrupulously clean and neat. When we entered her cottage she was just finishing that old woman's delight "a cup o' tea." There were only two chairs in the place. The Rector occupied one; I the other. Ben sat on the box. Old Betsey stood; nothing would induce her to sit in the presence of the "quality."

"Good day to you Mrs. Lake," said Mr. Gascoign in cheery tones, "your place is always so clean and sweet, it is a real pleasure to sit down in it." He knew that praise on that score was balm to the old woman's soul. She was so poor, and had so few pleasant sensations!

"Thank you kindly sir. And how be you sir, after your travels? and how be Miss Gascoign, if I may make so bold? and Mr. Travers, Miss?" turning to me; "I hope the Squire is nicely this fine day?"

"Papa's all right, thank you Betsey, and so is Miss Parsons and nurse, and the cats and everybody;" I replied. "But

Betsey, I want you to ask Mr. Gascoign what *he* believes about heaven; whether he thinks the poor will have to knock under to the rich, and be worse off than the rich."

"Of course not," said the Rector; "the Bible holds out especial promises of comfort to the poor."

"But about the pig, and the cottage rent free, Betty," I suggested.

"Well, if I might make so bold, sir," said Betsey, "its not for the likes of a poor old body like me to be picking and choosing; but *do* you think I might be allowed a two-roomed cottage rent-free in heaven, with a little bit of garden, and a place to hang out my wash, and a few fowls? Oh sir, does the Bible anywhere happen to mention whether there are pigs in heaven?"

"I think not," answered the Rector, carefully repressing a smile, "but I don't think you will wish to have a pig when you get there."

"But sir, if I am *me*, and not a sort of a bird, I shall like the same things there that I do here," pleaded Betsey, unwilling to give up her pig.

"But Betsey, though you will still be Betsey, your tastes may change a little. You may find some things there, much better than they are here. Now, when you were little Betsey of six years old, didn't you love sweets more than anything?"

"Sure enough I did sir, and now I can't abide 'em."

"You liked sugar plums and cakes much better than meat then, didn't you Betsey?"

"That I did, sir."

"And didn't you like playing with a doll, or running about half wild, above all things?"

"Yes sir, its true."

"You wouldn't care for that, now?"

"No indeed, sir; when I have tidied up the place, I love best to sit down and rest, and have my cup o' tea."

"And yet you are the same now that you were then, only you are old Betsey instead of young Betsey. As we grow older our tastes and habits change. But, depend upon it, you will have in heaven whatever you wish for when you are there. If you can't be happy without any particular thing, you will have that thing, for certain."

And so we left Betsey, quite satisfied about her celestial pig.

"But *shall* we eat in heaven?" asked Ben, raising his blue eyes towards the Rector.

"I dare say, my dear; but I don't think it matters much. Suppose the caterpillar could think, and were to bother himself with the idea that he wouldn't be able to crawl about and to eat cabbage leaves when he was a butterfly? The butterfly enjoys his life far more, I should think, than the caterpillar. He is the same creature; but his tastes have changed. No doubt it will be just the same with us; we shall retain our own identity, but our tastes will have become considerably altered. Just as the grown man no longer cares for the same things he valued when a child, so shall we, in a different sphere, no longer care for the things we deemed essential in this state of being."

"There is one thing I *can't* understand," said Ben. "You know, when we die, we all go into a horrid disgusting sort of state (in the grave); and then, after a long number of years that is all sucked up by the earth, and then becomes earth itself, doesn't it?"

"Yes Ben, you have described the process exactly," replied the Rector.

"(You are a nasty pig, Ben)," I interposed.

"Well Ben, and what then?" asked Mr. Gascoign.

"Then," continued my brother, "after more years, even the bones crumble into dust, till, if you only wait long enough, *nothing* remains of our bodies; and what was once *us*, may be grass, or earth, or air, or trees, or fruit."

"Yes Ben, that's just it," said Mr. Gascoign.

"Besides," said Ben, "think of all the good dirty christians and saints, who lived in dens and caves, and never washed, and were so pious, and were burnt to death; they went off at once into dust and cinders, you know."

"Well, Ben, what are you coming to?"

"This.—If we all, sooner or later, go off into smithereens, so that not an atom of us is left, how can it be true that we shall rise again with our bodies at the last day?"

"That question has puzzled many wiser persons than you or I Ben; but I think it may perhaps be met in this way. There *may* be a tiny atom of us which *cannot* be destroyed by either corruption, or fire, or anything. This little indestructible seed may be destined to grow and develope into a perfect body, exactly like our present body, at the last day.

If so, we have it within us now, and it is our real *us*—the *us* that cannot die. In this way only can I understand literally some passages of Scripture, especially the 15th of the 1st Corinthians (you shall go through it with me some day.) Here comes Mr. Pinchley."

I had not met the Curate since he had done me the honour to propose for me to my father. I suddenly remembered this, and felt rather shy, wondering whether he was aware that I knew it. I kept close to Mr. Gascoign.

"Good morning, Pinchley. We three have been engaged on a pastoral round, including some manual labour."

"Indeed," smiled Mr. Pinchley. "Have you worked very hard, Miss Winnie?"

"No indeed," I bluntly replied; "I did nothing, and Ben helped me. If it had not been for Mr. Gascoign, poor old Graves would still be seated in the ditch, surveying the ruins of his donkey-cart, like—who was it?" (to Mr. Gascoign) "surveying the ruins of thingumbob."

"Caius Marius," laughed the Rector; "what a dunce you are, Winnie!"

"Miss Winnie's naïvete is so charming," remarked the Curate.

"I'm *not* naïve," I indignantly protested. "I didn't remember the man's name, nor the place he lived in. I have only seen a picture of somebody surveying the ruins of something."

"You passed him, did you not?" asked Mr. Gascoign, rather drily."

"Yes-a-a-yes," drawled Mr. Pinchley, "I met no one at all near, or I would have sent them to help."

"Mr. Gascoign did it himself," put in Ben. "He hauled the cart out of the ditch, and spliced the wheel, and helped to harness the donkey, and saw old Graves fairly off. So there!"

Whether Mr. Pinchley felt the rebuke I don't know. Soon after, our roads diverged. Mr. Gascoign bade us good-bye, and the Curate had to go with him.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRESH from our walk with Mr. Gascoign, we went in to dinner that day, filled with penitential thoughts anent Aunt Jemima, and determined not to annoy her, either intentionally or unintentionally. We had not seen her since the morning, when she had so abruptly left the room on receiving the announcement of Mr. Pinchley's proposal for me; and we fully expected that she would be aggressive. To our utter astonishment, she was as quiet as a lamb, and her manner was positively gentle. On further inspection, we discovered that Aunt Jemima's eyes and nose were red—very red, while her face was of a paleness verging upon the ashen. Evidently Aunt Jemima had been crying.

Ben and I glanced at each other. We were sorry. We both had a sort of feeling of—"I wish we hadn't!" We would have given anything for a sharp word from Aunt Jemima; but it did not come. Dinner dragged its slow course—or rather courses—along, and came to an end at last. Then we went to the drawing-room, Aunt Jemima disappeared. Ben and I "confabbed" in a whisper.

"Ben," said I, "we have been beasts."

"Yes, specially me," said Ben. "I oughtn't to have told her, Pinchley had 'popped' for you."

"I told you not!" was my reproachful answer.

"What can we do now?" asked Ben. "When she comes into tea, shall we ask her if she has a headache? It would seem sympathising."

"Not for the world, Ben; she would know we had noticed her red eyes. I don't know *what* to do."

But our speculations as to any amends to be made to Aunt Jemima at tea time, were set at rest by a message from that forlorn lady to Miss Parsons, requesting that she would pour out tea, as she—Aunt Jemima—had a bad headache, and could not leave her room. We felt guiltier and more guilty. The evening wore slowly away. Bedtime came, and off we went.

It was a lovely night. The deep blue summer sky was sprinkled with countless stars. I leant out of my window, to

drink in the quiet dreamy beauty of the night. My name was softly whispered. Ben also was leaning out of his window.

"Winnie listen! Oh! poor Aunt Jemima! she is crying!"

It was quite piteous. Between her sobs, we could hear broken lamentations, sad appeals for help; for she was evidently saying her prayers. It was a mixture of the pathetic and the ludicrous; but, our better feelings being in the ascendant, we felt no inclination to be merry at poor Aunt Jem's expense.

"Oh! fool, fool! fool!—not to-to-know I-I-was old—and-and m-m-ade up! a ma-adeupoooldm-maid!" she sobbed.

"Shall we go to her, and say we are sorry, and won't do it again?" asked Ben.

"No dear, no; it wouldn't do. It would only vex her," I whispered. "Oh dear! how wicked we have been! I thought she never felt at all!"

"Yes," continued poor Aunt Jemima, "I have been bli-i-nded by vanity and conceit! I-I-have been jealous of little Winnie—unkind to her! And I have done her harm—made her rude—rebellious—ill-bred!—yes, good Lord, I do confess it!—and now I am chastised! But I do repent! I will try to be kind to her and Ben, though they are very trying—you know they are, dear Lord! Well, well, perhaps I have made them so! Oh grant that I may have a better spirit! Grant that I may see myself as I am,—a cross, ugly old maid! Grant me submission too! If it is willed that I am to die an old maid, grant that I may submit."

Poor Aunt Jemima! how she was struggling to do well, even while rebelling against her chastisement. It must have been so hard, to have all her little castles in the air so rudely thrown down.

As if in answer to my thoughts, she went on,—"But it is so hard! After giving up all for brother Robert, giving up the best years of my life to him, and after that, taking charge of his children, coming here to try and be a comfort to him—yes it *is* hard to—to—to feel that everyone wishes me out of the house!"

And here a fresh torrent of sobs choked her utterance. But her grief calmed down somewhat at last, and with a long deep sigh she closed the window. I went to bed, feeling utterly ashamed, conscience stricken, and penitent.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning dawned upon me with a dull feeling of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. I could not at first remember what had happened amiss; but by degrees I recalled the events of the night before. Poor Aunt Jemima! I suppose Ben felt much as I did, for he looked limp and uncomfortable.

Papa was utterly unconscious of anything amiss, and the kitten got on to the table, unreproved by him; nay, he even proceeded to stroke its back, which act of courtesy was received by kittums, with a sudden elevation of the tail, and a palpable advance towards the milk jug. I rose, and lifted poor kittums on to the floor.

"I know you don't like to see cats on the table, Aunt Jemima," I said; "and it would be a shame to let kittums stay there. Of course it is not nice nor proper; but we children are pigs, sometimes, and forget that others are not pigs too."

There was for an instant an incredulous smile on Aunt Jemima's face; evidently, she thought for the moment, that I was quizzing her. Meeting my look, she said, "Thank you, Winnie." Then, with an evident struggle against her repugnance, she added, "but this kitten is really a pretty creature, and it seems rather hard to turn it off the table now, after allowing it so long." So saying, she lifted kittums on to the table, and, pouring some milk into a saucer, allowed it to lap close to her!

Oh! how Ben and I hated ourselves!

"There, kittums," I said, "you have never been made so much of before! Oh Aunt Jemima, you will spoil kittums!"

I felt a perfect fool. My eyes were brimming over, my mouth was twitching, my voice was gurgling.

Papa was utterly bewildered; Miss Parsons, placidly pleased, and a little astonished. Aunt Jemima had still the same dejected appearance; but her smile was quite soft, as she said,

"Perhaps we have all been a little to blame, Winnie, dear, for not making allowance for each other's peculiar feelings."

"I am quite sure of it, Aunt Jemima," was my cordial rejoinder, "and so, I'm sure, is Ben."

"Yes, that I am!" cried Ben.

It all seemed so strange; everybody being at peace with everybody else. One could hardly understand it; for we had lived in an atmosphere of perpetual skirmishing for so long. Papa's face still presented an aspect of pleased bewilderment; Miss Parsons's, a mixture of placid satisfaction and inquiry; Aunt Jemima's, the same weary hopeless, crushed look, as though some one had dealt her a heavy blow, and she still felt half stunned. It was a decided relief, when breakfast was over, and we all dispersed.

But, as I passed Father's door on my way to the schoolroom, I saw that it stood ajar. He was waiting for me, and now called me in.

"What is it all about, Winnie?" he asked.

"Father dear," I replied, "Ben and I think we have been very unkind to Aunt Jemima, and we want to make amends."

"But what has made you think so, darling?" he asked, drawing me to his knee.

"From our windows, you know, Papa, we heard her saying her prayers last night; and she was in great trouble, and said that it was so hard, after all she had given up for you and us, to be treated so. And so it is!"

"Poor Jemima!" mused Papa. "Yes, Winnie, she has indeed sacrificed a great deal. She was twenty years of age, when our father died. Our mother had died three years before, and I was a little fellow of five,—the youngest. Jemima was engaged to marry a gentleman to whom she was very tenderly attached; but, instead of marrying, she took charge of us, and gave us more than a mother's care. I was her especial pet, though she bestowed equal care upon all of us. Time went on, and the man began to grow weary of the protracted engagement, especially as Jemima's youthful attractions waned—"

"Papa," I interrupted, "he could not have been worth much!"

"I never thought he was, my dear; but your aunt could not see his faults, and clung to him with persevering constancy. His visits became less and less frequent, and your aunt grew, first nervous and irritable, then sad and weary-looking. She has that look now."

"Yes, Papa. Well?—and what then?"

"At last he told her she must make up her mind to marry at once, or they had better part. It was a sad struggle between her devotion to him, and her love for me. The others were all launched upon life; I alone, a timid gentle boy, had not tried my wings abroad. She thought she could arrange matters, by suggesting that her home might still be mine; but this proposal met with a decided negative. High words ensued, and they parted. I think she was well rid of him; but she grieved long and hopelessly, and turned bitter upon her grief."

"Oh Father, how sorry I am! I wish I had known this sooner!"

"I ought to have told you, dear; but, till the other day, I have thought of you as of a child only."

"And so I am, dear Father! I want to be a child a *great* while longer!" I cried. "Oh! please—please forget all about that horrid Pinchley."

"By the way, Winnie, dear," said Papa, "I had quite forgotten. He won't take 'No' from me. He wants to have an answer from yourself."

"Then he won't!" I indignantly exclaimed; "the nasty crawling old humbug!"

"Hush, Winnie, hush!" said Father, "you know I can't bear to hear you use such language!"

"Papa, why didn't he pop to Aunt Jemima instead? I do believe she would have been quite pleased."

"I think they would be far more suited," he mused.

"Oh Papa, dear, do manage it!" I intreated. And then I told him what we had heard Aunt Jemima say about the Curate.

"I certainly think they would suit each other," pursued Father. "Dear, dear! how very unfortunate, that he should have got you into his head, and that she should know it."

"Papa, you must try. You must tell him positively that I hate him, and won't have anything to do with him. Then say something about Aunt Jemima. Something *must* be done, dear; we owe it to her! I can't bear to think what a beast I have been! And she looks so dreadfully unhappy."

"Well, dear, I will think it over, and——"

"Oh, good gracious, Papa, here's Pinchley!" I ejaculated. "Now mind, I *won't* see him! I won't! I won't!"

So saying, I flew upstairs, two steps at a time, and, reaching my own door, dashed into my room, and flung myself panting on a chair.

Up came the maid, to say that Mr. Pinchley wished to speak to me.

"I can't come, Jane—I can't indeed. Tell him I am particularly engaged, but Papa will see him."

Mr. Pinchley "confabbed" with Papa for a full hour, then he departed, and it was a great relief to me, to see his lanky form, clad in its long black coat, go bending and swaying down the avenue.

"Pig!" I ejaculated.

Not till long afterwards, did I receive details anent that same "confab." It was as follows.

Mr. Pinchley: "I am sorry your daughter is unable to see me, Mr. Travers. I had flattered myself that a personal interview might—aw—might—aw—have resulted in a manner favourable to—aw—my wishes."

Father: "I think not; Winnie appears to have quite made up her mind."

Mr. Pinchley: "But she may have some—aw—some objection which I should be able to—aw—smooth away. In short, she may be labouring under some misconception—aw—."

Father: "Not in the least" (losing his patience), "but she appears to have a rooted antipathy to yourself—in a matrimonial light—only in a matrimonial light, of course" (telling a little fib).

Mr. Pinchley: "Surely that might be overcome, Mr. Travers. Parental authority, you know!" (insinuatingly).

Father: "No, Mr. Pinchley" (sternly), "my daughter's inclinations shall never be forced by me."

A pause.

Father: "Besides, you have taken Winnie and me by surprise. We both thought your views lay in another direction."

Mr. Pinchley: "You amaze me! How could you have imagined? —"

Father: "Certainly, your attentions in that quarter have been so marked, that even the lady herself might well have been deceived."

Mr. Pinchley: "I am *utterly* at a loss to understand your meaning. In heaven's name, who is the lady?"

Father: "My sister Jemima."

Mr. Pinchley: "Good Heavens!" (in unfeigned horror) "I never had the *faintest* idea!—Oh, Mr. Travers, you must be joking."

Father (sternly): "Do I *look* as if I were joking, Mr. Pinchley?"

Mr. Pinchley: "Pardon me, I am so entirely taken by surprise, that—aw—. Of course I entertain the deepest respect—the most sincere regard—for Miss Travers; but I have viewed her in no other light, than as the aunt of your sweet daughter. Why sir, the disparity in years must alone have prevented my conceiving any thought of Miss Travers."

Father (coldly): "Pardon *me*, sir; but there can be no great disparity of years between you and my sister, though there is very great disparity of years, and everything else, between you and my young daughter" (hotly and angrily). "Moreover, you may not be aware of the fact, that I am about to marry again, and that my daughter, who has hitherto been considered an heiress, will probably inherit a very moderate fortune." (A perceptible elongation of Mr. Pinchley's countenance.) "I believe that in the present miserably paid condition of the Clerical profession, Clergymen are warranted in taking this consideration into account. I thought, that, in contemplating a union with my sister, though wealth was not the *end* you had in view, her income of £1,500 a year, might considerably tend to smooth away any scruples you might have, as to the prudence of marrying on a Curate's stipend."

A long, rueful, perplexed pause, on the part of Mr. Pinchley. A courteous awaiting on the part of my father.

Mr. Pinchley: "Really, Mr. Travers, you so astonish me, that—aw—I am quite—aw—unprepared—aw—a a aw—. If I could have thought, for one moment, that Miss Travers would ever have looked upon me in any other light than as a humble and respectful—aw—aw—. In short, I am entirely—as I said—aw—Perhaps I had better say Good morning."

Father: "Well, perhaps you had. But don't misunderstand me! Though I am positively certain as to Winnie's downright aversion—well, to marriage (she is but a child, you know), I am by no means sure, that if your choice had fallen upon my sister, you would have been more fortunate. I have no warrant for supposing it. Well, Good morning—Good morning."

As soon as the Curate was fairly out of sight, I betook myself to the school-room, where Miss Parsons awaited me. Ben was going through a course of French torture.

"Ben," I said, bursting in, "Pinchley has been here."

"Beast!" said Ben.

"Hush Ben, Hush!" put in Miss Parsons, "and go on with your lesson. I shall be ready for you soon, Winnie. Now Ben, go on."

Ben had to put into French, what Miss Parsons dictated in English.

Miss P.: "Outside the window—"

Ben.: "Sans la fenêtre—"

Miss P.: "No Ben—not *without* the window; *outside*—"

"Besides (from me) 'sang' is blood; isn't it?"

Miss P.: "Dear! dear! dear!"

"There's Vixen going to kill a chicken!" I screamed, dashing downstairs, followed by Ben.

We rescued the chicken, and returned to the school-room.

"Really, children, this is too bad!" remonstrated Miss Parsons.

"Now, you dear old darling, you know you would not have had the chicken killed!" I pleaded.

Miss Parsons had been so upset, that she had lost her place in the dictation, and took it up several lines further on. Ben and I winked at each other.

"Let me see," said Miss Parsons, "where were we? 'Outside the window is a path leading to a wood, through which runs a brook.' Now we will go on, Ben. 'In this brook are many fishes.' "

"Dans ce rissole sont plupart poisons," said Ben, confidently.

"No Ben. What do *you* say, Winnie?"

"Dans ce rosier sont plusieurs pecheurs," said I.

"Not at all; you are both wrong, and must get it right by to-morrow."

"Well, I know the next sentence," I pleaded.

"Very well," said Miss Parsons. "The velvety grass is beautifully decked with wild flowers.—"

"Le garçon de velours est bellement—decked? decked? I say Ben, what the dickens is the French for 'deck'? "

"I know!" said Ben, "for I found it in the dictionary, and wrote it out on my cuff for fear of forgetting it. 'Deck of a ship,—bord.' "

"Yes," I exclaimed, "the idea of my forgetting it! "Le garçon de velours est bellement bordé avec farine sauvage." There! Miss Parsons, dear, I took great pains with that sentence, and looked in the dictionary for every blessed word."

"Oh! you poor children! what is to become of you!" sighed Miss Parsons.

"What? isn't it right?" I asked.

"Well! I *am* blessed!" exclaimed Ben, who had been for a moment lost in speechless admiration of the easy manner in which so much French had flowed from my lips.

"No, dears, you must do it all over again. You have got hold of the wrong words. Often, you know, an English word has two or more meanings, which must be rendered by like words in French."

We stared at each other in mute dismay, hopelessly "dumbfoundered."

"It seems to me," said Ben, "that the French language is a deep and immutable mystery."

" 'Inscrutable', dear Ben," said Miss Parsons. "I wish you would not use fine words, unless you are sure they are the right ones."

"But they *sound* so well," argued Ben.

"Well, now bring me your French translation."

"Yes," responded Ben with alacrity, "I think you will be pleased with that! It is not so difficult as the other dodge."

"Oh Ben! Ben! *do* not be so vulgar!"

Then Ben commenced a remarkable and most ingenious performance.

"Il faisait si chaud, qu' Amabel sortit de la maison, et se promenait sur le gazon vert et doux."

"*Il*, he. *Faisait*, made. *Si*, so. *Chaud*, hot. *Qu' Amabel*, that Amabel. *Sortit*, jumped. *De la maison*, from the mason. *Et se promenait*, and walked herself. *Sur*, upon. *Le gazon*, the boy. *Vert et doux*, green and soft."

"He made so hot, that Amabel jumped from the mason, and walked herself upon the green and soft boy." "There!" exclaimed Ben, in quiet triumph.

Miss Parsons had vainly tried to stop him; she was now nearly crying.

"Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear! how *can* you, Ben! Don't you see that your translation makes no sense at all?"

"It's the fault of the language," said Ben; "it never seems to make sense; it's no use trying for it. Perhaps the French people understand it, and make sense of it, but it isn't suited to us English."

"It is a dreadful language," I exclaimed, "and they must be a dreadful people."

Just then the door opened, and in came Aunt Jemima, to ask Miss Parsons if she could spare us to go out with her! Poor Miss Parsons was no doubt glad to be released; and, with a delighted, "Oh, thank you, Aunt Jemima!" we rushed off to get ready; and soon after, we started.

Our way lay through the wood, then along a meadow, through which ran a deep, broad stream, which, further on, widened into a river. A little way off, we saw Mr. Gascoign in his punt, fishing, as usual; for he was a devoted angler. Ben ran along the bank, and bawled out to the Rector, "May I come?" and Mr. Gascoign, pulling to the shore, took him in. We had by this time reached the same spot, and Mr. Gascoign asked us if we would not join him also. Aunt Jemima declined; so did I, on the plea that I was having a nice walk with Aunt Jemima. Whereupon, Ben looked guilty and distressed, and said, that as Aunt Jemima had been so very kind as to take him away from a horrid lesson to walk with her, he thought he would not go fishing that morning.

There was a look of bewildered satisfaction on Mr. Gascoign's face, which spoke plainly as words could have spoken, "wonders will never cease!" but he only replied, "Quite right, jump out, little man."

Aunt Jemima declared that Ben should not lose his pleasure, and that she would take him for a walk another day, and Winnie too; but I said it was such a long time since I had had a walk with her, that I would rather stay with Aunt Jemima this morning.

"But oh! Mr. Gascoign," I said, "*is* Miss Gascoign coming back soon? I *do* want her so!"

"Why do you 'want her so?' you most ungrammatical young person."

"Oh! because she is so nice and dear."

"Oh, that's it? Well, she is not coming back just yet. When she goes off on one of her visiting matches, she is generally away for months, you know."

"Yes, I do wish she had not any friends!" I exclaimed; "then she would have to stop here. Of course, everybody tried to keep her as long as possible with them."

"Then you won't come?" asked the Rector.

The answer being again in the negative, he pushed off with Ben, while Aunt Jemima and I slowly sauntered along, to where the stream, now almost a river, was bordered by another wood. It was very hot, but tall beech trees threw an impenetrable shade over us. We sat down. I was glad to be alone with poor Aunt Jemima; I wanted to tell her how sorry I was, that I had always been so rude to her; but I felt very shy about it. With an effort, I began.

"It was very kind of you to take us out this morning, Aunt Jemima. We have not deserved any kindness from you. We have behaved like brute beasts, and deserved a good whipping.

"No, no, Winnie; we did not understand each other. It was more my fault than yours, dear."

"Coo! Coo!" cried the wood-pigeons over head.

"I hope I shall never again do anything to give you pain," I continued.

Aunt Jemima's lip quivered; then, suddenly bending, she kissed me, and, with a short, sharp catching of her breath, faltered,—

"I hope you will be happy in your married life, little Winnie."

"I am not going to be married!" I exclaimed. "Surely you don't think I am going to marry Mr. Pinchley, Aunt?"

"Not—going—to—marry—" stammered my Aunt.

"Well—some day I suppose I must. Everybody does in the end. You will, too, some day, of course. But I—oh! how I wish I could always be a child!"

"But, to refuse Mr. Pinchley!" ejaculated my Aunt, in utter amazement.

"He has never asked me to marry him, Aunt. You mustn't believe all that Ben says in his fun."

"But your father, Winnie—"

I was perplexed, but tried to get out of the difficulty.

"Poor Father! don't you remember what dreadful confusion we were all in, that morning? Poor Father didn't know whether he stood upon his head or his heels. In fact we were all mad."

"But would you not marry Mr. Pinchley, if he were to ask you, Winnie."

"No indeed, nor anyone else, for the next twenty years. And as to Mr. Pinchley, I am a child, compared to him! He must be quite thirty years, or more, older than I. Why, he is older than you, Aunt Jemima! Would he think of marrying a child, like me?"

"Coo! Coo! Coo! Coo!" from the dear wood-pigeons over head. How soft and tranquil was the wood, that sweet summer day! Many a time in the years gone by, has the soft cooing of wood-pigeons brought back to my memory that day, when we two sat there—Aunt Jemima and I—at peace with each other and all the world. It was one of the days that I remembered most, when my great trouble fell upon me, such a very, very, little time after; yes, even before the wood-pigeons had ceased to coo!

CHAPTER X.

DEAR Father and I were sitting in the grotto. The day was hot beyond expression, one perfect glare of heat; but here, it was as cool as heart could wish. It was a luxury to spend whole hours in the grotto, on such a day. There were great rocks over-head and all around, and they overhung the grotto; and amongst them grew mosses and ferns, and drooping things innumerable; and from above, a little brook fell dripping and trickling down into a deep cold pool, fern and moss-bordered. The pool was always full, and would have brimmed over, but for a break in its rocky basin, where it gently flowed over, and again dripped and trickled down over a little precipice of rock, into a tiny valley below; and there it wandered on, murmuring softly till it joined the river.

As I said, I was sitting here with dear Father. He had brought one of his beloved books; but when I had joined him, he had laid it down. I was nestled at his feet, and his arm pillowed my untidy head against his knee.

"Isn't it nice here, Father?" I asked. "Doesn't it make one feel happy and peaceful, and inclined to be good?"

"Yes," said Father; then, abruptly,—"Winnie darling, I have been so much happier, since you and Ben have got on with your aunt."

"Father dear, I'm so glad!" I joyfully exclaimed; "and now that you are happier with us, you won't have to marry!"

"I did not say that, my dear," he gravely responded.

"No dear, but you *meant* it," I pleaded.

He was silent. Drip! Drip! Trickle! Trickle! went the little brook.

"You meant it! say you meant it, dear Father!" I intreated.

"I did not mean it, Winnie," he replied, still more gravely than before.

"Oh, Father! Father!"

I was so disappointed. Ben and I had quite hoped he

would give up the idea of this horrid marriage, now that we were all going on happily together. For awhile he did not answer. I longed for his next words, yet feared what they might lead to; for my stubborn pride would not yield to the thought of a step-mother. At last he spoke.

"Winnie, darling, I am sure you will love your new Mother. I am *certain* you will!"

"I shall not! I *will* not!" I passionately exclaimed; "no, not if she were an angel!—not if she were Miss Parsons, or even Miss Gascoign! Never! Never! If she comes here, I won't stay!"

In my blind, unreasoning fury, I overshot the mark. Father arose, with a heavy shadow of displeasure clouding his brow. Without a word, he left the grotto.

I stayed alone, choking with grief and rage. I hated everything; the grotto, the ferns, the little lake, the murmuring of the dropping brook; and—most of all—I hated myself. For as my rage abated, my grief gained the mastery. I saw that I had deeply offended my dear father; it seemed to me irreparable. I feared he would never forgive me. I almost wished he would return, and give me another chance of submitting to this odious marriage; I almost felt, that if he did, I would yield, rather than see that look again upon his face.

I thought I heard the sound of approaching footsteps. The next moment I felt certain. Yes! Was it Father?

It was Mr. Gascoign. He came in quietly, and sat down beside me. He looked so serious, that I felt sure Papa had told him.

"Father has told you?" I asked.

"Yes; and I have come to tell you what I think of your conduct."

I hung my head in utter discomfiture. The only answer I could think of was,—

"But I don't prevent Father from marrying! He can do so if he likes."

"No, he cannot. The lady refuses to marry him against the wishes of his children. She has told him most positively, that if he cannot obtain your consent (and Ben's) the engagement must come to an end. I think it foolish of her."

"Ah!" I ungenerously replied, "she knows, that two grown up cubs, could easily make the house too hot to hold her!"

"Not at all: from what little I know of the lady in question, I think she is quite able to hold her own, against a dozen such unruly children as you," quietly remarked Mr. Gascoign.

"Ah," I exclaimed, "a shrew!"

"No, quite the reverse," he replied.

"What did Papa say to you?" I asked.

"Not very much," responded Mr. Gascoign; "but he said you were so frantically opposed to this marriage, that you declared you would not admit *any* step-mother into the house, not even though it were your favorite Miss Parsons; nay, nor even my sister. I thank you very much for *that*, Winnie!"

"I am so sorry!" was all I could say; still hanging my guilty head.

"What is the use of being sorry, if you don't try to make amends?" asked Mr. Gascoign. "I'll tell you what, Winnie, you will have to give in, so you had better do it with a good grace."

"Oh! I can't! I can't!" I pleaded; but I know that I felt irresolute, and I daresay my tone of voice betrayed that I did so.

"Winnie," he continued, "the fact is, you *have* given in—"

I started.

"Yes, in your heart! But you are held back by some miserable paltry feeling or other. Now, what is it?"

"What will Ben think?" I stammered.

"As if Ben did not think all you do, perfection!"

"But still—a step-mother—"

"Come, come, this is childish, Winnie! Now, as you have already given in, in your heart, do it bravely and openly. Write your father a little note, and tell him you are sorry you have vexed him, and you consent to his marriage."

"But I know I shall hate her all the same!"

"No you won't; she is really a very nice person, whom you can't help loving."

"*We* shall not love her; but as dear Father would be vexed if we were rude to her, we must try to *seem* as if we liked her, I suppose."

And with this compromise, good, peace-making Mr. Gascoign was fain to be content, and thereupon took leave. Then I went to look for Ben, whom I found near the house, armed with a garden syringe, which he held levelled in the direction

of the drawing-room window. Little had he divined the dreadful struggle I had been going through; his face was one sparkle of suppressed fun.

"Oh, Winnie, where ever *have* you been?" he exclaimed, "I've wanted you so! there's Pinchley in the drawing-room, come to see you, I suppose; and nobody's there but Aunt Jemima. *Shall* I give him a shower?" And the syringe, which he had depressed for the moment, was again elevated.

"Ben, this is no time for larks," I replied (impressively, I thought); "I have something most important to tell you!"

"The kitten—" gasped Ben.

"No, dear;—Father.—I have consented to his marriage!"

"Well—I *am* blowed!" ejaculated Ben.

"Yes, dear," I loftily continued, "I have consented because —because it was *right!*—And—and" (with a sudden come-down of dignity) "because I could not help it."

Then I told him about my interviews with our father and the Rector.

"I'm so glad, Winnie!" exclaimed dear, good-hearted little Ben, "now we shall all be jolly together!"

"No, Ben, not exactly," I demurred; "we can still hate her quietly, you know!"

"But will that be 'right,' Winnie?"

"Well, you know Ben, as old Betty says, 'human natur is human natur,' and 'we can't help our natur.' "

Then we concocted a wonderful composition, which Ben wrote at my dictation. We both agreed that it must be a semi-official document, of a business character, as it would probably have to be shown to the "beast of a woman," as we politely termed our intended step-mother.

"You write, Ben," I said, "while I dictate. The sentences will flow more easily if I am not disturbed by having to think of the spelling."

"But you spell better than me," remonstrated Ben.

"Never mind," I said, "we can correct it before it goes off to the beast of a woman."

"All right!" said Ben. "Fire away."

And I "fired away" accordingly.

"Darling Papa

"We the undersinned do thurraly consent to your

marridge and hope you will be happy and we are sorey we have given you so much trubble about it but we thout it would have been a very dredfull thing to have a stepmother in the house but we will try to reconsil ourselves to it if it will make you happy and so we remane your loving children.

"WINNIE.

"BEN."

"Ah, ah!" broke in the Rector's cheery voice. "What are you two about? Writing a book?"

It was in the library, that this remarkable production was being penned. Ben was seated at the table; his right hand guided the pen: his left arm supported his head on the table, so that his eyes were on a line with the document. I sat at a little distance; my eyes were turned upwards to the ceiling in search of inspiration, my right hand was raised in an attitude of declamation. The Rector, in passing the open window, had taken in the same.

"No," I replied; "we are composing the little note for Papa, you know. Please to tell us if it will do."

"Yes, capitally;" he replied, without relaxing a muscle of his countenance. "I will take it to your father at once."

"But the spelling?" I remonstrated. "Ben spells so abominably!"

"Never mind, it will do; the sooner your father gets it, the sooner he will be happy!"

Off he went with the note; and in a few minutes our father folded us in his arms, and called us "his own dear unselfish children!"

Ah me! how little we deserved our father's love!

CHAPTER XI.

OUR father was off, the next day but one; of course, to see the "beast of a woman," as I still persisted in calling her. He asked us, nervously, to accompany him, but we declined, saying, "Please, Papa dear, we would rather not." And so he went, looking so bright and pleased, that we relented a little, and felt rather pleased, too, and gloriously self-elated, at the thought that "it was *our* doing."

"For we might have stopped the marriage if we had chosen, Ben," said I, "since the woman would not consent to marry poor Dad till we agreed. Ah! she knew better!"

"Perhaps she may turn out nice, after all. Who knows?" Ben timidly suggested.

"Ben!" I exclaimed in awful accents. And he was silent.

But before Papa left, it was arranged that Ben and I were to go to school after these summer holidays. We no longer demurred; in fact we longed to be away from the house when our abhorred step-mother returned. Besides, as matters were arranged, Ben and I would not be so entirely severed after all; for Uncle Richard lived about half way between Ben's school and mine; so, every Wednesday afternoon, we were to spend with him, and every Saturday we were to go there till the following Monday. Also, if we pleased, Nurse was to come and see us once a month, with a hamper of delicacies. We knew that our dear father would come oftener still. These brilliant advantages had been secured for us by Uncle Richard, who had influence with our pedagogue and pedagoguess. Things might have been worse.

The day after Papa's departure, Aunt Jemima was taken ill, with a sort of feverish cold, and Dr. Gillias was sent for. We were a little afraid of Dr. Gillias, perhaps because he was our Doctor, and could administer nauseous compounds without any power of resistance on our part. He was a tall, rather heavy, impatient looking, irritable man, cool and quiet in the sick room, but a perfect martinet to all who attended upon the patient, and a marvel of despotic irritability where he thought there had been any blundering, or the least infringement of his orders.

Aunt Jemima was sitting in the drawing-room, attired in a becoming deshabille, when Dr. Gillias came. After feeling her pulse, and asking a few questions, he ordered her to bed.

"Oh no," demurred the invalid, "I *never* lie in bed. Couldn't think of it."

"You'll have to think of it, Ma'am," sharply barked the doctor. "You have sent for me, and I order you to bed! You have a nasty feverish cold, which will last for weeks, if you don't take it in time. Go to bed, and I shall send you some medicine. Don't get up till I have seen you again. If you are prudent you will be all right in a few days. If you are foolish you will be regularly laid up."

And off went the doctor.

Now Aunt Jemima had arranged, as I said, a very becoming deshabille, and, ill though she really felt, the ruling passion was strong; so, as soon as Dr. Gillias was gone, she rang the bell, and told George that she was at home to visitors that afternoon. Ben and I exchanged glances, which said as plainly as glances could speak, "She expects Pinchley." The footman had hardly left the room, when Aunt Jem again rang the bell, and the functionary returned.

"George,—Perhaps, as Dr. Gillias says I am to go to bed, you had better say 'Not at home'—unless Mr. Pinchley should call. I would see him." Then, addressing Miss Parsons, "As I cannot go out, I shall feel anxious about my poor people."

Miss Parsons murmured something to the effect that "if *she* could do anything—" but Aunt Jem replied, that Mr. Pinchley knew all the poor people's necessities so well," etc.

It was Wednesday—a half holiday, and we generally spent it out of doors; but to-day, it was dull, and rather drizzling, so Ben and I lounged about the room with books, looked out of the windows, and teased the cats. Aunt Jem evidently fidgeted, and wished us away. We wanted to stay in, and see whether the Curate came; and he did come.

He entered, in what Ben called "a slithering, sliding way," like an amiable eel, and, making for Aunt Jemima, spoke in his softest tones, and with an infusion of tender solicitude, which compelled us to retreat to the window for awhile, and, within the shadow of the curtains, to smother our merriment as best we could.

"I was coming here, my dear Miss Travers, when I met Dr. Gillias, and he informed me of your sad indisposition. I trust—Oh! I trust—you will take care of yourself. A life so very—very precious to—to—so many—." Here he paused, either for want of ideas, or to convey the impression that he was too much overcome for words.

"I fear you are mistaken," sighed Aunt Jemima; "my life is of little consequence to anyone. All here have their ties—their interests; but I—a—a—tisha!"

A gigantic sneeze rendered the conclusion of Aunt Jemima's affecting little speech, quite abortive.

"And why should not *you* have your ties and interests, dear Miss Travers?—Surely—"

Bang! Ben had been balancing a pile of books on his head; I had tried to place the kitten on the top, and down fell the whole with a crash.

Aunt Jem started. Pinchley—yes, the gentle Pinchley positively lost his temper, and—stamped his foot!

"Those children are too much for you, in your delicate state; they have no consideration!" he exclaimed.

"Children," said Aunt Jemima, "why don't you go out? Young people should be always in the open air."

"It is too wet, Aunt Jemima," I answered.

"Why not go to Miss Parsons, then?" pursued Aunt Jemima.

"Half holiday," said Ben; "we never bother Miss Parsons on half holidays. She wants to be quiet, and write letters."

How perverse we were! We saw that Mr. Pinchley and Aunt Jem did not want us, so we determined to stay, to spite him.

Thus foiled in his attempt to rid himself of our presence, that shining pillar of the Church drew closer to Aunt Jemima, and taking an album from the table, proceeded to draw her attention to some of the photographs; interspersing his comments on the photo's with remarks of another kind, uttered in a half strangled murmur, strongly suggestive of a dyspeptic ring-dove.

"Is not this a lovely face?" asked Aunt Jem.

"Well—a—do you think so?" replied the Curate, with his head awry—(how he reminded me of a chicken with the pip)—"I cannot bear to differ from you; but—perhaps I am

peculiar—I never could admire that doll-like style. Now, to me, this portrait is far more attractive." And he turned from the portrait of a charming young girl, to that of a mature dame of some forty-five or fifty summers. "I like *mind*, you know, and—and *style*. There is something *here*, to hold you for ever; there,—a pretty doll! a pretty doll!"

It was funny, to see the Curate wagging his head from side to side, as he looked first on one side of the page, and then on the other.

"Doesn't he remind you of Punch?"

"Yes, and isn't Aunt Jem like Judy?" I rejoined.

Ben burst out laughing, and I could not help joining. We both roared at the idea of Punch and Judy flirting. Mr. Pinchley suspected we were laughing at him. He rose to leave. Aunt Jem rose too.

"There is a little flower in the garden just outside," said the Curate, "the name of which I should like to know, if you would kindly tell me, dear Miss Travers.—It rains no longer. The sun is breaking out. A little fresh air would revive you."

"I don't know," murmured Aunt Jemima. "Well—perhaps—"

And out they both went into the garden. Aunt Jem, with a little pink cloud thrown coquettishly over her head, and with her feet shod in thin slippers, adorned with very ravishing rosettes.

Ben and I flew to the library, where, from the open window, we could watch the fun.

They stood upon the damp ground, affecting to examine a rose. Aunt Jemima's head was half averted. The Curate was speaking with great unction. There they stood for quite twenty minutes, till Aunt Jemima was seized with a dreadful fit of sneezing. Then she came in, looking very pleased, but with her nose rather blue and pinched.

As the day wore on, one fit of sneezing after another from Aunt Jemima, told that she had, as Ben said, "a sweet thing in colds." Then she began to shiver violently. A general stuffiness of speech and manner supervened. Also, Aunt Jem was waxing cross. People do, with colds of that sort.

"Why don't you go to bed, Aunt Jemima?" I pleaded. "You know Dr. Gillias told you to."

"I shall go whel I please," snapped the invalid.

"What would Dr. Gillias say if he knew you had been out in the garden?" asked Ben.

"Dever you bind," was the uncourteous response.

"Miss Travers, dear," softly cooed Miss Parsons, "you have really a very severe cold. If you *would* allow me to persuade you!—a basin of hot gruel, in bed, and put your feet in mustard and water, and tallow your nose.—My grandmother always recommended me to tallow my nose."

"Dodsence!" snapped Aunt Jemima.

Miss Parsons succumbed. Ere long, however, Aunt Jemima, evidently very ill, retired, and rang for her maid. Miss Parsons met that attendant entering Aunt Jemima's room, with a cup of hot gruel and a tallow candle on a tray. A maid followed, with a large can of hot water. Miss Parsons felt relieved.

"Yes, my dears," she said to us, "nothing like tallowing the nose for a cold of that sort. Don't forget that, dears, when you are grown up."

"A—a—tisha!" said I.

"Why don't you tallow your doze?" Ben asked me, in imitation of Aunt Jemima. "Dothing like it, Biss Parsons, depend upon it."

"Oh, you naughty boy!" said the dear kind soul.

So we kissed her, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XII.

BUT poor Aunt Jemima was very ill the next day, and worse still the day after, and in some danger for nearly a week. Dr. Gillias was furious. In the sick room he was quiet and cool enough; but out of it, he was a sort of uncaged tiger out of its mind.

"All women are fools! There's not a sensible woman to be found in all the world—(and I've travelled much)—no not one!—except Miss Gascoign—except Miss Gascoign of course; they are all fools—idiots—maniacs!—Now then, where's that poultice? Where's that woman that pretends she knows how to make a poultice? I never knew a woman that could make a poultice—never, except Miss Gascoign. Oh! here it is at last—Hum! yes, that will do." And so on.

All the time that Aunt Jemima was ill, Mr. Pinchley was indefatigable in his inquiries. Four or five times every day did his tall form wind itself up the avenue, and, having received the usual bulletin, "about the same, sir," wind itself out of sight again. But at last Aunt Jemima was pronounced better, then convalescent, and then she was allowed to recline upon her sofa at her window, which commanded a view of the avenue.

One day, Ben and I, returning from a walk, saw Aunt Jem at her window. She did not see us, for she was looking straight forward. And lo! Aunt Jem raised herself on her pillows, and—yes, kissed her hand, then and there, to some person or persons unknown! We ran forward, and darted round a corner, just in time to see the Curate's retreating form trailing itself away. So then we knew that Aunt Jemima and Mr. Pinchley were going to be married.

Looking back upon that time, it seems as if there had been no peace or quiet after. Either Aunt Jemima suffered from the irritability usual with convalescents, or Mr. Pinchley, who appeared to have imbibed a rooted antipathy to me, influenced her, or both, I don't know what was the reason;

but she found fault with everything I said or did. I was indignant, so was Ben; but we tried to refrain, knowing how ill Aunt Jemima had been. Still, every day our patience waned; it was only a question of time. We knew that a storm must come soon.

The house was to be re-papered, and to a great extent refurnished. Aunt Jemima's illness had delayed operations, but now the full tide of workmen fell upon us in unmitigated force. Discomfort reigned paramount for three weeks; then there was a great calm, and we wandered about in the renovated rooms, admiring everything.

Our father's intended marriage had been duly announced to the servants, who, one and all (except nurse) from the housekeeper down to the scullery maid, had "resigned their appointments." Thereupon fresh ones were engaged to come from London that day month; so that matter was settled.

The next startling event, was the announcement of Aunt Jemima's intended nuptials, which she postponed till one week after the advent of the new set of vassals. Immediately after her marriage, Miss Parsons was to take us to school. Miss Parsons, it was arranged, was to board in the school to which I was going; and thus, everyone was satisfied.

Satisfied? No, *we* were not! We had given in to this marriage, because we so loved our father, that we could not bear to stand in the way of his happiness; but we loathed the thought of a step-mother's presence in the house. When Father had been about to speak of her to me, I had burst out crying, half in grief, half in passion, and had said that I did not want to hear her name—that I *would* not listen; and dear Father had answered, with a deeply pained look, that he would not mention the lady to me again. And so the subject was a sealed one, then and after. But our antipathy to the marriage, and to going to school, grew stronger and stronger, and we often half wished we had held to our original determination of emigrating, if our father persisted in marrying. He had written to us on the eve of his wedding-day. Then had come a blank. Aunt Jem's illness had prevented her attending the wedding. We made no excuse at all; but Mr. Gascoign and Dr. Gillias had gone to it.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was one week before Aunt Jem's wedding. All the servants had departed by train that morning; the others were to have come, but had unfortunately missed the train; so, poor Nurse was our sole factotum till the next day. Miss Parsons had been summoned away by telegram the day before, to her mother, who was dangerously ill. Everything was uncomfortable in the house; and Ben and I had, what I called "our grumbling tackle on," at the thought of so soon being separated.

"Oh! how much nicer, to have held out, and have bolted away, with our sixty pounds!"

It was a very hot day, and we were wandering listlessly about in the garden. The house was too dreary; for Aunt Jem was always snappish to us now, and Mr. Pinchley was almost a fixture in the drawing-room. By the by, the only drop of comfort in our cup of bitterness, was, that that young Divine had obtained a living sixty miles off, and thus we should be rid of both him and his bride at the same time. Mr. Gascoign was again away, and our dear Miss Gascoign was still absent,—a great loss to us; she always consoled us in our troubles.

And so, we were sauntering about the garden, bemoaning our fate, wishing ourselves cabin boys, or missionaries, or anything, so long as we were to be together, and not to go to school, or to have a step-mother.

"There's Pinchley!" said Ben, pointing to the avenue, up which came that rising ecclesiastic, bending and swaying his lanky form as he progressed. "If he goes on that way, he'll break himself in two some day! That's one comfort!"

We turned off into a bye-path in order not to meet him, and waited till we had seen him enter the house.

"There's that pig of a strange cat, come to murder our dear kittums! If I don't!—Winnie, quick! Let's get the garden engine, and play upon him!" exclaimed Ben.

No sooner said than done. We saw the strange cat prowl up to the house, bent on the massacre of our dear kittums.

The garden engine was loaded, and heavy, but we pushed it up to the house. When just outside the drawing-room window, the strange cat saw us, and decamped.

"Sold!" said Ben.

"S-s-s-h!" I whispered.

Then a voice—it was the voice of Mr. Pinchley—pronounced these words, "What, my beloved! you are surely jesting! To suppose that I could ever for one moment have entertained any other thought than of disgust, for that wretched little Winnie, who is unworthy to be your niece!"

"Liar, and sneak!" roared little Ben. And, through the open window, he pumped away at the garden engine, till he had discharged the whole of its contents—eighteen gallons—over the Curate and Aunt Jemima.

And alas! not only over them, but over the new carpet and furniture, and delicately tinted walls!

And, what is more, the garden engine had been charged with soot and water, intended for slugs and snails, and other unpleasant slimy creatures, though certainly not for Mr. Pinchley!

How well I remember the whole scene! Aunt Jemima and Mr. Pinchley exactly opposite to us, soaked with the sooty shower, and dripping from head to foot. Behind them, the newly papered walls were steeped in the same black rainfall; carpet, chairs, tables, pictures, all, all, shared the same fate. I was horror stricken, but Ben was still hot with indignation.

Aunt Jemima was the first to speak. Choking with wrath, and with a sooty drop slowly swelling at the tip of her nose, she exclaimed, "Impious miscreants!"

And the drop fell.

"Sacriligious monsters!"

Another drop was gathering.

"Thus to assail the Lord's anointed servant!"

Downfall of drop No. 2.

"I forgive them!" snuffled poor Mr. Pinchley, as, drawing forth his cambric handkerchief, he attempted to dry his sooty features; which performance resulted in his assuming the aspect of a negro melodist, the black being more evenly spread over his countenance.

"We don't want your forgiveness, you sneaking old liar!"

shouted Ben. "It was like your impudence to think of marrying my blessed Winnie! She would as soon have married a toad, as you! And it is like your meanness, to turn against her because she would not have you! So there!"

And poor little Ben, fairly overwrought in his great love for me, and his fury against anyone who went against me, rushed away from the window. As I followed him, Aunt Jemima called to me, "Miserable child! your father returns in a fortnight! What will he think, when he brings his bride into the room you have ruined?"

That shot told. However, I said nothing, but followed Ben, whom I found, lying with his face upon the grass, sobbing passionately.

The dear brave little heart! Always in trouble, for me! I gathered him in my arms, and called him my darling, and said I was proud of him, and that he was my blessing and my comfort; and so, after a time, my dear little Ben smiled in my face, and promised not to fret any more.

"We must go now, Ben," I said, after a long silence; "we can't stay after this. We could never face Father."

"You won't mind going away with me, Winnie? I'll take care of you! I'll fight for you!"

"No, I shan't mind going with you darling; we will never be separated as long as we live!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT last night in our home—our dear, dear home—is as vividly before me now, as it was at the time; nay, the picture seems to stand out even more strongly after all these years. The quiet still night; the deep shadows cast upon the lawn by the large trees; the silvery streams of moonlight, which fell broadly here and there upon the peaked gables of the dear old house, and shimmered upon the roof, and shone full upon our bed-room windows—little Ben's and mine. Ah me! ah me! After all these years, the shadow falls deep as ever upon my heart, when I recall that last night in our dear home!

When we had gone but a little way, and turned round to look at the house, Ben burst out weeping, and, throwing his arms around me, pleaded, "Oh Winnie! Winnie! It's a dreadful thing to do! To leave our darling home! And when poor Father hears of it! Oh! poor dear father!"

"He should not have married!" I sternly replied.

"But we gave our consent, Winnie."

"Yes—because we couldn't help it."

"Never mind—oh! Winnie, I feel as if we were doing wrong! *Don't* let us run away! Some harm will come of it. God will punish us!"

The dear, innocent child! He was wiser than I; but I thought differently, then.

Instead of soothing my brother, I angrily bade him be silent, or go back, if he felt afraid, and I would go alone. I taunted him with being "like a girl," and said, that I feared he would prove a coward after all, if we should ever be in danger. Whereupon, he drew himself up, and exclaimed, "No, indeed, Winnie! you'll see if I won't fight for you when the time comes! And do you think I would stay behind without you? No indeed!"

I was still angry, and replied, though rather more gently than before, "You *dare* not stay behind without me! You are afraid to face Father, after spoiling the drawing-room."

"No, Winnie, it isn't that. I can't bear to *grieve* Father.

I am less afraid of staying behind, than of grieving Father. Oh! think what it will be for him to find us gone, and not to know what has become of us!"

"Nurse will set that all right; and then we will write a letter from somewhere or other, and Father will answer it in the 'Times' you know, saying, 'If Winnie and Ben will return to their desolate father, all will be forgotten and forgiven, and no questions will be asked.'"

"Yes, dear," said Ben, brightening up, "and then we will come back. Oh, how nice!"

We had been walking on all the while; and soon after, had gained the high road. Five minutes more, brought us to the railway station, and we took our tickets for the train, which was to start in about ten minutes. We did not show ourselves at the ticket office, but gave a porter, new upon the line, and who did not know us, a shilling, to take our tickets for us. This, we thought a wonderful precaution.

We considered that our plans were very deep-laid, and impossible to be found out; and on retrospection, it does appear to me, that, for two children, who had seen nothing of the world, we displayed considerable finesse. We had gone to bed at nine o'clock, as usual, having sat in the school-room with nurse, up to that time. We were dreadfully vexed at having to deceive dear old Nurse, and we planned how we could best manage so as to leave her some little comfort. So we set to work, to tell tales; and nurse began.

It was a wonderful tale, about a fairy prince and princess, who started upon their travels, and encountered many strange adventures. We had heard this same tale about once a week, ever since our infancy, and knew it so well, that if nurse deviated by a hair's breadth from the original MS. we pulled her up short, and set her right; yet the narrative had possessed a never ceasing fascination for us. To-night, however, our thoughts were elsewhere. For the first time, Nurse told the tale from beginning to end, without being once corrected. When she had finished, it was Ben's turn to tell the next tale; so he began: "Once upon a time, there were two children, who lived in a fairy palace, and had everything to make them happy. The Prince, their father, loved them dearly, and let them do as they liked, in all things. But the good Prince's sister was a wicked old witch, and hated the

two children, and did all she could to spite them, especially the Prince's beautiful little daughter, whom she hated because she was young and pretty, and she—the witch—was old and ugly——"

"Just like your Aunt Jemima, my dear," put in Nurse.

"Yes, nurse," pursued Ben; "and the children had also a dear old nurse, whom they loved with all their heart and soul—mind that, darling nursey!—never forget that!"

Poor Ben's voice was quivering.

"Why, bless his dear little heart! he's telling his own story!" put in Nurse.

"You won't say so, when you hear the rest," said Ben. "Though the children loved their darling father, and their good kind nurse, they had not courage to stay at home with their cruel old hag of an aunt; and so they ran away one night, —out into the darkness and the night, and—oh! but they were wicked children, I think, to give such pain to those who loved them!"

And here, poor tender-hearted little Ben broke into passionate tears.

"Nonsense! it is only a story," I interrupted; "and the rest is not gloomy at all. Let me finish it, Ben. They met with many strange and wonderful adventures, and found friends everywhere; and after a while, when the spiteful old witch had left, they came back to their father, and their dear old nurse, and were all happy together."

We had sat a little longer after telling this story, and then we had kissed nurse, and gone to bed. Every one was tired that night, so the house was soon quiet. We heard the church clock strike forth eleven; then we cautiously crept down stairs, each carrying a little bundle, and were soon in the open air. I had left a little note for Nurse on my pillow, telling her not to be frightened about us, as we should soon be back; that we had plenty of money, and no harm would befall us. I solemnly enjoined her, not to give the alarm sooner than could be helped; and then, with many words of love, I said goodbye for myself and Ben.

So it came, that my brother and I were whirled along in the dark together, by the midnight train, feeling as if we were in a dream, and must wake up soon, and find ourselves in our own beds, in the dear home we had abandoned so

hastily. The night wore away tediously. I dosed at intervals, but always woke when we stopped at a station, which was very frequently; and always found that Ben was awake, and watching me anxiously. Two or three times, when he thought I was asleep, he drew my wrap closer around me. Poor dear little fellow! He could not forget my reproaches; evidently he had taken them deeply to heart, and was determined to constitute himself my protector.

And thus the night passed away.

CHAPTER XV.

WE kept no sort of journal of our travels; so that to this day I do not know what places we stopped at. We had the very vaguest notions of the various lines of railway. Rule, or plan, we had none; we wandered about aimlessly, sometimes by railway, sometimes on foot. Sometimes we travelled by night, because we thought we should be less likely to be recognised than by day.

We awoke fairly that first morning about an hour before the train reached its destination, and had time to discuss our plans for the day.

"What do you propose, Ben?" I asked.

"Breakfast first," was his prompt reply.

"But where, Ben?"

"At an hotel."

"But we don't know which is the best," I argued.

"I do," said Ben, with proud elation. "Before that last man got out at the last station, I asked him to lend me his Bradshaw. I forget the name of the town we are coming to, but I saw that the train stopped there a goodish time. It seemed to me that it never went anywhere at all after it got there, unless it started twenty minutes before it arrived, which it could not possibly do, you know, try as they might. However, the name of the first hotel is "The Red Lion," and we will go there."

"In a fly, Ben?"

"Yes, dear; I will choose the nicest looking fly at the station, and the driver will touch his hat to me, and will say, 'Where to, sir?' and I will say, without any preturbation——"

"P*er*turbation, dear Ben."

"Thank you, dear—yes, p*er*turbation,—'To the Red Lion,' and he will drive us there."

"And then, Ben?"

"Then, a footman—waiter, I mean, or perhaps the landlord, will come to the door, and will bow to us, and I shall say, 'show this lady to a room, and prepare breakfast.' That's the way they do in books, Winnie."

"Yes, Ben; and we must try to look as grave as we can, and must not burst out laughing in the waiter's face. You mustn't 'dudge' me."

"Not for the world, dear. I haven't forgotten what you said about my being like a girl. *You'll* see if I don't know how to take care of you like a man!—yes, and you'll see if I won't fight too, when the time comes."

All the while that I was talking with Ben, it was dawning upon me that our relative position towards each other had changed. At home he had looked up to me, deferred to me, consulted me, fifty times a day. I had been his oracle, and, to him, the embodiment of all wisdom under the sun. I should no more have thought of asking his opinion, except for the sake of justifying my own, than I should have thought of consulting little Pearl. Now it was all changed. Thrown upon our own resources, with no indulgent Father, doting nurse, and devoted servants, to depend upon, all the latent pluck, bravery, and decision, in Ben's nature, became suddenly developed; while I began to experience a timidity almost amounting to cowardice. All my old bluster was melting away, at the thought of being thrown amongst strange people in strange places. As fire tries metal, even so did changed circumstances bring out all the beauty in little Ben's character, all the blemishes in mine. But I did not realise all this at that time; only I had a vague sense of wounded self love, and this made me say,—"What an advantage it is to us, Ben, that you have travelled!"

"I haven't travelled much, Winnie dear, only to school and back, four times, and once, quite alone, when I went to visit Uncle Richard, and dear Father was suddenly prevented going with me."

"That gave you great experience, Ben! You had to change the train three times!"

"Yes, dear; and each time I got into the wrong one, and at last nearly went off to Scotland; only the guard had his eye upon me, and hauled me out just in time, and there I was standing on the platform, while my box was carried off by the brute of a train."

We both laughed heartily at this specimen of Ben's cleverness in travelling. Soon after, there was a scream from the engine, and we plunged into a tunnel. Coming out of it at

the other end, we found ourselves at our destination. A bell was pealing away for its very life. The train was grating along, as if loth to stop. Porters were shouting a name, impossible to make out. The train at last abandoned its hopeless attempt to continue on its way, and stopped. Then a rude porter sharply unlocked the door, and swung it open, again shouting out the impossible-to-be-made-out name; and despite my effort to stop him, passed on, and rudely swung open all the other doors, in a desperate hurry, as if he had not a moment to lose.

Ben got out, and then helped me to do the same. We stood upon the platform, a little boy and girl, clad in yachting suits of dark blue serge, which we selected as being more durable than any other portion of our wardrobe. Each was armed with a neatly strapped bundle, and each bundle contained a little change of linen, a brush and comb, and toothbrush, enfolded in brown paper, the whole being rolled in waterproof wraps, strapped tightly up, in company with an umbrella. We were a neat looking couple, as we stood there that bright summer morning; nevertheless, we felt strange and abashed.

At last a porter came up to us, and asked if we had any luggage.

"No," said Ben, "we want a fly to take us to the Red Lion."

Ben departed a little from his programme. He was to have chosen "the nicest looking fly," but he forgot. However, the fly was forthcoming, and, as the porter was very polite, carrying our bundles for us, and addressing us as "Miss" and "Sir," Ben "tipped" him a shilling.

"For it is right to encourage good manners, you know," said Ben.

"Of course dear," I assented.

"Drive this gentleman and lady to the Red Lion, cabby, and be sure you drive carefully," said the polite porter; and we drove off.

"Ben," I observed, "why did that porter wink at the driver?"

"I don't know," replied Ben; "I suppose they always do."

The driver, too, was scrupulously polite; and, on letting

down the steps for me to alight at the Red Lion, addressed me as "my lady." I felt flattered. I thought I must look so much older than I had imagined.

"How much?" asked Ben, looking very aged.

"Five shillings, yer honour," was the prompt reply; and off he went.

An elderly waiter stood mildly regarding us, at the entrance of the hotel. To him, up spake Ben: "Show this lady to a room, and I will order breakfast" (mindful of the programme). I admired Ben.

The mild waiter forthwith rang a bell, and an elderly chambermaid appeared, and ushered me into a neat sitting-room, where Ben soon joined me.

"I have ordered coffee and tea, and eggs, and cold ham. Will that do, Winnie?" he asked.

"Yes Ben, I am starving."

He raised his dear bright little face towards mine, in mute appeal.

"What is it, darling?" I asked.

"Are you pleased with me, Winnie? Am I doing everything right?—like a boy—not like a girl?"

"That you are, my own brave boy!" and I kissed the dear earnest face, turned upwards so pleadingly to mine.

We stayed at the Red Lion till the next morning, and then decided to resume our journey by the seven o'clock train. A fly was sent for; and the elderly waiter, whom we had donated liberally, said to us, "The fare to the railway station is only eighteen pence, Miss."

"But we paid five shillings yesterday," I remonstrated.

"You were overcharged," was the reply.

So then we understood, why that porter had winked.

Arrived at the station, Ben left me in charge of the wraps, while he went and took the tickets. We were soon in our places in the train.

"How did you know what place to take tickets for, Ben?"

"I noticed some people with a lot of luggage, labelled—well, I forget the name now, but I thought they must be going a good way, with so much luggage; so I took tickets for that place."

"Clever boy! How well you manage!"

"Talking of managing, Winnie dear, don't you think we ought to keep accounts? Everyone—all *grown-up* people—keep accounts, don't they?"

"Well—a-a-yes—perhaps. Do you know how to keep accounts, Ben?"

"I have never done it, because there was no need; but Uncle Richard always used to tell me I must keep accounts when I grew up. He said it was 'a check upon slavish expenditure.'"

"'Lavish' dear, not 'slavish.' But have we time, do you think? Suppose a train were starting, and we had to rush into the carriage, there would be no time to put down what we paid for our tickets, and for the fly."

"No, Winnie, but I should remember, and could put it down, as soon as we started."

"Very well, dear; then we will keep accounts, and the next place we come to, we will put down all we have spent already. By the way, would it not be as well to leave the train, one or two stations before the place we have taken tickets for?"

"Why, dear?"

"I have heard that people sometimes do it, to foil pursuit."

"Are you sure 'foil' is the right word Winnie dear? Oughtn't it to be 'spoil?'"

"No, 'foil' is the word Ben."

"Ah yes, I remember now! I had it in my spelling lesson, 'Foil;' to 'depeat.'"

"No, dear Ben, 'defeat.' That was where I learnt it. 'Foil pursuit; to defeat pursuit."

"All right, dear; I always like to use the right word when I can. It is better, of course. But, about where we shall get out; I think, as it is a lovely day, we will get out at some place that looks pretty and nice, and go for a walk."

"Capital! What a clever boy you are, Ben!"

"I am so glad when you praise me, Winnie!" and the dear boy threw his arms lovingly round my neck. "I *was* so miserable, that night we left, after you had scolded me, and said I was a coward and 'like a girl.' I couldn't sleep at all in the train; and I kept thinking—thinking—and remembering that I was only a little boy after all, and what would happen if you were in any danger—if anybody were to attack you!

Because, being only a little boy, if a very big rude boy called you names, or threw a stone at you, I could fight him as long as I could stand; but after that, what would become of you?"

"You mustn't remember those wicked cruel words of mine, dear Ben. I was not myself. I could not bear to leave. It was dreadful to go away from the dear house, and nurse, and Pearl. Didn't Pearl look pretty, sleeping, as we saw her for the last time?"

"I very nearly brought her away with us," said Ben.

"Very fortunate you did not, Ben. She would have been wretched, travelling."

The train now stopped at a station, and some people got into our carriage ("department," Ben called it); so we journeyed on in silence, for about an hour.

It was lovely, here. We had entered a deep valley. High on each side, rose richly wooded hills. Before the open country had been shut from our sight, we had seen a river in the distance; and countless little streams here and there, looked like so many tiny threads of silver, shimmering in the bright sunshine.

"We will get out at the very next station, and go for a walk," I whispered to Ben.

A scream from the engine, a grating sound as the breaks were applied, and the train stopped at a tiny station, flanked on either side by a pretty garden, full of flowers. A solitary station-master pronounced the name of the place distinctly, and opened our carriage door. We got out, and, armed with our two bundles, mounted the long flight of steps which led up from the cutting.

As the train went off, puffing and fussing, Ben said, "I'm glad we got out of that, Winnie. I thought those people in our department eyed us suspiciously!"

"I don't see why they should, dear. Oh! what a lovely country! *Now*, we *shall* have a pleasant day!"

In wild excitement, Ben threw his hat into the air, shouting "Hurrah! hurrah!" and, holding hands, we ran on, till we were out of breath. Then we flung ourselves down on a grassy bank, and panted.

"Oh Ben!" I said, when I could breathe again, "what silly geese we are!"

"Why?" asked Ben.

"Breakfast," I ejaculated. "What a pity we came away in such a hurry, without it."

We gazed ruefully at each other for a minute; then burst into peals of laughter.

"What duffers!" exclaimed Ben.

"What's to be done?" I asked.

And again the little valley echoed with our merry shouts. How well I remember the clear ringing silvery tones of little Ben's voice, as we sat there that bright summer morning! Even now, it sometimes comes back to me in my dreams, and I fancy I am sitting there, half way up the pretty valley, all sweet sights and sounds around us, only our two selves to care for, or think of, the present moment all in all. Only in childhood can it be so!

"I'm not so *very* hungry," said Ben, at last.

"*I am* though!" I ejaculated: "I could eat anything—anything!"

"A boiled rat?" asked Ben.

And then followed another peal of laughter.

We consulted our watches.

"Ten o'clock!" I exclaimed, "No wonder we are famishing! Oh Ben, how dreadful it would be, if we wandered on from day to day, and never came to any place where we could get food, and at last were to cast lots which should eat the other! People do, who are shipwrecked; so the newspapers say."

"But we are not on the sea," remonstrated Ben, "we are on dry land, and by walking, must soon come to some place where we can get something."

"Then let us go on," I said; and on we went.

Through maze after maze of tangled forest growth, by little zig-zag paths, over masses of rock, but always up—up. At last the trees grew fewer and not so large, the little brooks smaller, the grass and herbage less luxuriant. Heath grew here and there in great abundance. We looked at our watches, and found we had been climbing for an hour and a half.

"Where can we be?" I asked.

"On some mountain—perhaps in Wales—or Scotland?" hazarded Ben.

"If we are in Wales," I said, "the women will wear hats,

like men, (for they are drawn so in our geography you know); and if in Scotland, the men will wear plaid petticoats, and have cold bare knees, and big hairy hats, and bag-pipes. You remember the Scotch piper, Ben?"

"Oh yes dear, and what a hideous noise he made with his claymore."

"Not 'claymore' Ben,—'bag-pipes.' What a bad head you have for names."

"So I have: his 'claymore' was that sort of apron with little tails upon it. But I always think of 'claymore' because at the same time we had a farm servant of that name, don't you remember? And Papa said Scotchmen wore claymores."

"Yes, I remember; but oh dear, Ben, aren't you hungry?" I asked.

"Pretty well," said the dear brave little fellow. I knew he was quite faint from want of food.

"Where *can* we be?" I exclaimed. We had now gained the top of the hill, and, sitting down, could look around us.

There were hills, hills everywhere, as far as we could see; hills, some, much higher than the one we had climbed, some lower, but always hills, and we could see nothing beyond. Only, dense woods appeared here and there, woods and hills—nothing else.

It was a glorious view, but we would rather have seen a town, or even one little cottage, where we could get something to eat.

Bitterly disappointed, I burst into tears. "Oh, Ben! Ben!" I sobbed.

"Don't cry, Winnie darling—oh! *don't* cry, my blessed Winnie! If you cry, you won't be able to walk. And we *must* walk, and get out of this," pleaded the dear sensible little fellow, rising to his feet. I followed, and on we went.

"No doubt we are in Wales," pursued Ben, "and when we come to a churchyard we shall know by the names on the tombstones. Uncle Richard says, that there are only two or three names in Wales; everybody must be Owen Davies, or David Owens, or David Williams; so, if we find the churchyard full of those names, we shall know we are in Wales."

"And what good will that do us?" I pettishly exclaimed. "*I* want to find an hotel!—or, if not that, a baker's shop!"

"So we shall soon, darling. Now, which way shall we take?"

For, two little paths went off in different directions, one up, the other down.

"How can I tell?" I exclaimed, almost crying with impatience. "How I wish we had stayed in the train!"

Dear little Ben looked very piteous. He paused, and then said,—"These hills are very high—mountains, perhaps. We have got to the top of this one, and we see higher ones beyond. We see no houses or cottages anywhere. It must be very cold and blowy there in the winter. People would be more likely to live in the valleys, wouldn't they, Winnie?"

"You are a dear sensible boy!" I said, penitently kissing him. "I love you dearly, Ben! Never think I don't, if I now and then speak crossly. It is my horrid, horrid temper!"

Ben's face cleared, like a sweet landscape after a summer shower, as he replied, cheerily, "Then we will try this path, dear."

As we descended, the grass and flowers grew thicker and more luxuriant, and the trees larger; till we found ourselves in a wood, and soon came to a place where four little paths met. Which to take? It was a puzzle.

"We must not get lost in this wood," mused little Ben, "that would never do." He looked sadly perplexed. At last he said, "I think—don't you, dear?—we had better keep the path on a straight line with the one we have come down the hill. It seems to me, that it must be the principal one, and that the others are just made by people who go to gather wood, or something."

"Yes, you dear boy, I think you are right," I assented, thoroughly ashamed of my past ill-temper.

Following this path, as it wound along for about twenty minutes, we both gave a little scream of joy; for, not far before us, was a boy, gathering brambles!

Rushing forward, we asked, in a breath, "What is this place called?"

"This be Kimberton wood—it be?"

"Take us to the nearest cottage, or farm, or house, and I will give you half-a-crown!" exclaimed Ben, producing that coin.

The boy stared stupidly, and said, "You be a-mockin' of me!"

"No," said Ben, "I shall give you this half-crown, if you take us to any place where we can get something to eat."

"Summat to eat?—why, there be the Crown an' Anchor, there be."

"Take us there at once!" I commanded. "Oh Ben! only to think! an hotel!"

The rustic shambled on ahead, and we followed, till—oh! blessed sight, better than all the grand views in the world, we came to a little village, nestled there among the hills.

"There be the Crown an' Anchor!" said our guide, pointing before him with his thumb to a little green, whereon stood a very small inn, with a sign-board swinging over the door, upon which something was painted.

We gave him the half-crown, and made straight for the Crown and Anchor.

It was a tiny inn, and looked very cosy, standing upon the village green. A person, like an ostler, was giving water to a horse, which stood at the door. A stout, cheery-looking woman was throwing barley to some fowls. A fresh, good-tempered girl was standing beside them knitting, now and then throwing a glance or a word to the person like an ostler. These three were, the landlady, her son, and her niece, and they comprised the whole establishment. The trio paused in their occupation, and stared at us in unfeigned astonishment.

"If you please, ma'am," said little Ben, "will you let us have some breakfast? We have come from a great distance, and are very hungry."

The dear little face looked so sweet and pleading, that I could not wonder at the good woman's catching him in her arms, and giving him a sounding kiss. At another time I might have been offended; but now, tired and hungry, and alone in a strange place, it gave us a sense of comfort, a sort of home feeling at once.

"That I will, my little man! Bless your sweet face!" exclaimed the good woman. "And is this young lady your sister?" she asked, regarding me, evidently with more respect, though less partiality, than Ben.

"Yes, ma'am, and she is *very* hungry and tired, and she has never been used to be hungry and tired."

"Come along then, dears;" and the good motherly creature showed us into the little inn parlour, where everything was very cosy; and scrupulously clean and neat.

"What can we have for breakfast?" asked Ben.

"Eggs—bacon," said the landlady, and stopped there.

"Then please bring us some eggs and bacon, and bread and butter, and tea, as soon as ever you can; and while it is getting ready, we should like to have a wash—shouldn't we, Winnie?"

"Yes, dear. Will you please show us to our bedrooms, Mrs.—a—a—" I paused.

"Thatcher, my dear," said the landlady. "Do you think of making any stay here?"

"Yes, for a few days, I think. We are so tired, and want to rest."

Mrs. Thatcher regarded us curiously, but kept her thoughts to herself, and showed us up a little staircase, to two tiny rooms, adjoining each other. The niece, who was called Keziah, brought us some hot water and towels. Through the lath and plaster partition which separated my room from Ben's, we kept up a lively discourse.

"Jolly—isn't it?" from Ben.

"Couldn't be jollier!" from me.

"Shan't I eat a lot!" from Ben.

"Do you smell the bacon cooking, Ben. Isn't it lovely."

"Stunning!" from Ben.

My toilet was soon completed; so was Ben's; as he said, "we were too peckish for much grooming." Then he came into my room to see what it was like, and I went into his on a similar tour of inspection. They were tiny apartments, and everything in them was scrubbed and polished to the verge of utter annihilation. The floors were uncarpeted, and so spotlessly clean, that, as Mrs. Thatcher said, "you might eat your dinner off of them." There were snow white hangings to the little beds, and to the windows, all trimmed round the edges with a kind of fringe terminated with bobs, which I never see in old fashioned houses, without remembering the little village inn.

CHAPTER XVI.

"BREAKFAST'S ready, dears," said the landlady. Evidently, we looked *very* young, or she would have called us 'Ma'am' and 'Sir.' However, we didn't mind. Away from all our natural protectors, it cheered us up, and gave us a sort of home-feeling, to be treated as children by a kind motherly creature like our good landlady.

Oh! how tempting that little breakfast looked! The snowy tablecloth, the polished china, the large loaf of home-made bread, the cool fresh butter, the eggs and bacon done to a turn, and the boiling hot tea, the pleasant aroma of which, blending with that of eggs and bacon, was, to our famished senses, more gratifying at that moment, than could have been the perfume of the sweetest flowers.

We fell to; and, for five minutes, silence prevailed. When we spoke, it was only to praise the fare.

"Stunning bread and butter!" from Ben.

"Jolly eggs and bacon!" from me.

"Clipping tea!" from Ben.

And then another silence.

At last, when we had eaten, and were filled, the conversation became of a more general nature.

"I wonder where we are," I said. "Evidently not in Scotland, for the people don't dress differently from our own poor people; nor in Wales, for our landlady's name is not Davies, nor Jones, nor Owens. Where *can* we be?"

"Ireland?" suggested Ben.

"Oh you silly boy!" I exclaimed, "we should have to cross the sea for that!"

"Should we?" asked Ben. "Ah! I never was a good scholar."

"You are pretty good at arithmetic, dear," I replied; "Oh! *do* let us begin our accounts directly after breakfast. I suppose this little bell set beside me, is meant to call Mrs. Thatcher." So, seizing it, I rang; and that good dame appeared, and quickly removed the eatables and drinkables.

"If you please, ma'am," said Ben, "could you let us have a little writing paper?"

"Yes, my dear. And pen and ink?"

"No thank you; I have a pencil."

"Well, I thought, dear, perhaps you might be going to write to your Ma," pursued Mrs. Thatcher, throwing out a "feeler."

"No, Ma'am," said Ben.

"We have no mother," said I; "only a cruel step-mother."

"Ah! that's it; poor dears! and so you've run away from 'ome?"

"We have left home for a little while," I evasively replied.

"Well, well, those step-mothers are dreadful cruel sometimes. Fathers didn't ought to give their poor motherless children step-mothers and step-fathers. I lost my dear 'usband fifteen years ago, and I've done my best to bring up my Jack respectable; but I've never given him a step-father. When I die, the Crown and Anchor will be his."

"Is Jack married?" asked Ben, with much interest.

"No, dear; but he has kept company with my niece for the last five years, and they are to be married after the harvest is got in."

"Is that Keziah?" I asked.

"Yes, dear, and a good prudent young woman as ever you'd wish to see, and a good wife she'll make my Jack, though she hasn't a penny to her fortune."

"Will they live here?" asked Ben.

"Yes, dear; where else should they go? There's a good bit of land about the place, and it will be theirs when I die."

"It is a nice place to live in," I said; "I think I could stay here always."

"Oh! you'd soon tire of, it dears; you like it now, because it is all new and strange to you."

So saying, she left the room, soon to return with some writing paper. We cleared a space on the table, and prepared to begin our accounts.

"Now Ben," I premised, "we left home on Wednesday night. Ah! darling Pearl! how sweet she looked! I wonder what she is doing now?"

"Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!" exclaimed Ben, clasping his hands with a look of misery.

"What?" I asked, "Have you lost your purse?"

"No dear, *much* worse than that! To think of our for-

getting, what a dreadful upset to the poor cats, the horrid new servants will be! I know the new cook will forget to give them their eleven o'clock luncheon, and their afternoon milk! I *know* she will!"

"*I* thought of that, Ben; and just at the last, I added a little postscript in my note to nurse."

"What did you say, Winnie dear?"

"'Above all, dear old Nurse, take care of our precious cats, and see that they have their food as usual. For *our* sakes!'"

"Then they are quite sure to be seen to," said Ben, much relieved. "But for that, we must have gone home."

"Yes dear, of course," I replied, "unless we could have telegraphed."

"Now, for our accounts," said Ben.

"We left home on Wednesday, and this is only Friday. What a long time ago it seems!" and he sighed.

"Are you sorry, Ben?" I asked reproachfully.

"No Winnie, darling, it couldn't be helped; and I am always happy anywhere, with you," said the dear brave little fellow.

Then we settled down to our accounts. First, we drew pounds, shillings, and pence columns; then we rested our elbows upon the table, and our chins upon our hands, and stared at each other. We did not know how in the world to begin.

It was very absurd, and so we felt it. Ben's face relaxed into a smile, as did mine; and after that, we had a good laugh.

"Don't you think," asked Ben, trying to be grave, "that as we have now got it ship-shape, and in trim for a start, we have done enough for to-day, and might put it off till to-morrow?"

"Well—a—I'm so afraid of forgetting what we have spent," I replied.

"Oh! *I* have it all in my head, as clear as possible," said Ben, confidently. "However, it would be more business-like, perhaps, to begin now."

"Well then," I asked, "what did you pay for our tickets that first night?"

Ben looked perplexed. "Didn't I tell you dear, at the time?"

"No, we were much too hurried and frightened," I answered; "but I should think that journey cost about a pound each, don't you?"

"Just what I thought," replied Ben. "Then we will put down, 'Railway journey from home to unknown place, about two pounds."

"Yes, that will do capitally," I exclaimed. "Oh! but you gave a shilling, at starting, to that strange porter, for taking our tickets."

"Very well—'Strange porter at starting, one shilling.'"

"Then, when we arrived, Ben, you gave a shilling to that polite porter, who winked."

"Yes, I had better mention that he winked, to fix him in our minds. It is better to be acrid."

"'*Accurate*,' dear Ben,—Yes, put down 'Polite porter who winked' (to distinguish him from the one who didn't wink, you know!)"

"'Polite porter, who winked, one shilling,'" wrote Ben.

"Then Ben, five shillings to extor—tionate cabman."

I saw Ben struggling with the orthography of the word extortionate, and therefore came to the rescue.

"'E—x—'" I began. 'E—x—' wrote Ben. "'t—o—r—'" I continued. 't—o—r' pursued Ben. "'t—u—;' no—that does not look right," I mused; "it is a *very* difficult word to spell! Suppose we say 'cheating'?"

So, Ben wrote, 'Five shillings to cheating cabman.'

"The next thing, was the bill at the Red Lion. How much was it, Ben?"

"About a pound each," replied Ben, confidently.

"Then, the fly to the station. That, I know, was one shilling and sixpence!" said I. And that was booked.

"Well, our journey to here?" I asked.

"About a pound each," replied Ben.

"How strange it is!" I observed, "that our railway fare always comes to about a pound each."

"Well, you know," argued Ben, "I think that must be what Uncle Richard used to call 'striking a balance.' If I am not quite sure, to a shilling or so, I strike a balance, and say, 'about.'"

"A capital plan," I said approvingly. "Now let us add it all up."

	£	s.	d.
Railway journey from home to unknown place—about	2	0	0
Strange porter at starting	1	0	0
Polite porter who winked	0	1	0
Five shillings to cheating cab-man . .	5	0	0
Bill at Red Lion	2	0	0
Fly to Station	1	6	0
Journey to here	0	2	0
	£11	9	0

"Eleven pounds, nine shillings and naught pence," said Ben.

"And we have been away, only two nights and a day!" I exclaimed. "Ah! travelling is very expensive."

"We ought to have nearly forty-nine pounds left," said Ben, after a long silence, during which he had been going through a severe amount of mental arithmetic.

But, on counting the contents of our purses, we found ourselves to the good by some pounds. We could not make it out.

"Perhaps I forgot to pay for the tickets somewhere," said Ben.

"Or, perhaps we did not count our money correctly before starting," I suggested.

"Or, perhaps we have not added it up right," said Ben.

So, when I looked through Ben's figures afresh, I found that he had inserted them indiscriminately in the various columns. This being set right, we found the result nearer the mark; but still we could not make it square.

"Depend upon it," said Ben, "it all comes of striking a balance."

No doubt he was right.

CHAPTER XVII.

"NOW, let us go out!" I cried, starting up; and seizing Ben by both hands, we swung round and round, till we tumbled on to the little sofa, giddy and out of breath.

"Oh! *isn't* it fun! Isn't it most jolly fun, Ben," I exclaimed. "Couldn't you live this sort of life for ever?"

"Yes," he assented, "no lessons—no Aunt Jem—no nothing that's nasty!"

"Poor Miss Parsons!" I said. "If we could have had her without the lessons! She was so good and nice."

"I wish we could put on invisible cloaks, sit upon that flying carpet, and take a flight home, just look down and see what they are doing, and then come back here. Wouldn't you, Win?"

"Yes; but I think I can tell without the cloaks and the flying carpet. Nurse is sorting our things over and over again, sighing sometimes, and wondering where 'those poor dear lambs' are. Then she reads my note for the fiftieth time, and, coming to the postscript, goes down to the hall, to see whether the cat's bowl of sop wants replenishing—that's nurse."

"Well, Winnie dear,—and the others?"

"Aunt Jem is seated in sole possession of the drawing-room."

"No," interrupted Ben, "Not '*sole*;' for Pinchley is there—"

"Of course, Ben; but are they not *one?*"

"Ah, yes, of course, dear. Go on."

—"And Pinchley and Aunt Jem are seated very close together on the sofa," I pursued; "very comfortable indeed, discussing their approaching wedding, and hoping 'those ill-bred cubs' will stay away till it is over!"

"Ah!" said Ben, "it is a pity we could not have seen that wedding! It would have been awful larks!"

"Yes, Pinchley will be grand," I replied.

"Who will be there? I wonder," said Ben.

"Oh, don't you remember it was to be very quiet, as Papa was away. Mr. Gascoign was to marry them, and Dr. Gillias

was to give away the bride. If Miss Gascoign has returned, she will be there of course."

"Darling Miss Gascoign!" exclaimed Ben, in rapture. "Ah! Winnie," he sighed, "I am afraid she will think very badly of us, for running away!"

"No," I argued, "she is too kind, and loving, and gentle, to think badly of anyone, least of all, of us. Oh! *why* wasn't she at home, when Papa went away! She would have stood by us, without quarrelling with Aunt Jem. She is so charming."

"Instead of running straight away," said Ben, "we should have gone to her, that night, and she would have put us to bed, and sent home a message early the next morning."

"Yes," I continued. "And she would have kept us with her, till she had made peace, and then she would have taken us home herself."

"Wouldn't it be horrid," said Ben, "if she were to marry Dr. Gillias?"

"Dr. Gillias!" I laughed; "Oh! you ridiculous boy! What an idea!"

"I know Dr. Gillias would like it," persisted Ben.

"I should *think* so!" was my indignant reply. "As if *anyone* wouldn't be glad to marry Miss Gascoign."

"But no one is good enough for her!" said Ben.

"I should think not!" I ejaculated.

"Isn't she grand, to look at!" pursued Ben, enthusiastically.

"Isn't her singing delicious? And isn't she sweet and loveable. And there is something so—so—gracious—that is the word, Ben—about her—" I said.

"Yes," replied Ben, "and though she is so sweet and—and *gracious;* she can be angry—yes, very angry sometimes, not for herself, but if anyone she loves, or thinks helpless, is ill-treated—"

—"And then," I continued, "she is so full of fun; no one makes me laugh, as she does."

"And she is so handsome, with her calm, grand face, and that lovely, lovely smile—"

I interrupted. "And she is much more grand-looking than other people, and though she is so large and tall, she looks just the right size—other people who are as large and tall as Miss Gascoign, look big and clumsy; but Miss Gascoign's size, only makes those around her look mean—"

"Yes, by caparison," put in Ben.

"*Com*parison, dear," I suggested.

"Yes—(thank you, Winnie)—oh! *why* didn't the Governor marry Miss Gascoign, instead of that horrid beast of a woman!" he sighed.

"Why indeed!" and I echoed his sigh. "That *would* have been a blessed thing for us! Fancy, to have her always in the house—never to go away on those horrid long visits—"

"My dears," quoth Mrs. Thatcher, entering the room after a little tap, "what time will you have your dinner?"

"I suppose at seven, eh Ben?" I answered, appealing to him.

"Seven! why, bless the children!" exclaimed good Mrs. Thatcher, "you ought to be a-bed by that time."

"What time would suit you best, Ma'am?" asked polite little Ben.

"Oh! that don't matter at all," replied our hostess; "only, young folks just come into the country, are mostly ready for their dinner by one—"

"Delightful!" I exclaimed, "it will be so new, and odd! We will dine at one—if you please, Mrs. Thatcher."

"And what will you have, dears?"

"I think, a little fish, and a little soup, and a chicken, and a pudding, would be enough," I hazarded.

Mrs. Thatcher smiled. "I'm not used to dishing for the 'Quality,'" she observed; "and we are too far away from shops, to get all you have been used to, Miss—"

"Oh! we don't mind—do we, Ben?" I answered; "give us whatever you can, please, Mrs. Thatcher."

"Well Miss, you can have fresh trout, and a roast chicken, and a rasher of ham, and apple dumplings."

"Delicious!" we exclaimed, in a breath—and I added, "You are a capital manager, Mrs. Thatcher! I feel hungry already; don't you, Ben?"

"Well dears, suppose you have your dinner at three o'clock to-day; and after that, one."

"Very well; then let us go out till dinner," we said.

Before starting, Mrs. Thatcher impressed upon us the necessity of not losing our way; and she said that we were to be sure and remember her address—"Thatcher's, the Crown and Anchor, Kimberton."

We started, laughing, and repeating to each other, ever and

anon, "Thatcher's, Crown and Anchor." And thus the address became so firmly graven in my memory, that I don't think anything could afterwards have erased it. When my great trouble fell upon me, and a "horror of great darkness" was all around me, how I blessed that bright morning, when we repeated so often to each other, in season and out of season, the words "Thatcher's—Crown and Anchor—Kimberton."

We crossed the little green, and entered upon a high road, and then branched off down a lane, and got over a stile, and went through several fields, till we came to a very pleasant valley, through which ran a river, delicious to look upon. So we threw ourselves down upon the grass, and watched the cool water rolling along, sparkling in the hot sunshine.

"I wonder what is the name of this river, Ben," I said.

"Thatcher's, Crown and Anchor, Kimberton," was his reply. And we laughed irrepressibly, as if he had said the wittiest thing imaginable.

It was so pleasant, lying there doing nothing, listening to the quiet lapping of the river against the banks. Sometimes, water-fowl would come sailing along, gobbling at the scum of insects on the surface of the water, or diving in search of fish, or chasing each other in fun or anger. Now and then, a fish would leap out of the water, and the sunbeams, smiting on his glittering coat, would make him appear as if clad in silver, opal, or gold. It was very pleasant; but the sight of the fish reminded us of our dinner, so we arose, and wended our way homewards.

Mrs. Thatcher stood at the door of the little inn, looking out for us.

"Ready for dinner, dears? hungry, eh?" she asked.

"— As any fifty million hunters," replied Ben. "How soon will it be ready, ma'am?"

Ben called her ma'am, because he was the kindest and politest little boy in all the world. "Besides, Winnie," he had said to me, "Mrs. Thatcher is a respectable person, living in her own house, while we are only two little tramps, with no respectability at all, now we have run away from home."

I did not like this view of the case, but could not dispute it, and so held my peace, and let him do as he liked.

The trout, and chicken, and apple dumplings, met with our entire approval; and for dessert, we had some delicious plums.

Then we sat at the window, which looked upon the green. Outside, in the porch, were Keziah and her intended; she was knitting; he, burnishing harness.

"I wonder how that sort of people make love," suggested Ben; "do you think they spoon and pay compliments, like Aunt Jem and Pinchley?"

"Hush!" I said, "they are talking." The swain spoke first.

"— And so I says, 'four shillin' a hundred! Don't you try for to take a chap in like that, with his eyes open!' I says. 'Wot'll you give then?' he says, says he. 'I'll give,' says I, 'three shillin' and a pot of beer,' I says. 'Oh come now!' says he, and he turns him round to go. I lets him, and makes belief to turn away, like, and then he says, says he, 'three and three,' he says. 'No,' says I, 'three shillin' and a pot o' beer,' I says. 'They're dirt cheap,' he says, a 'givin' in."

"And so he let you have them for three shillings," asked Keziah, deeply interested in this affecting anecdote.

"— And a pot o' beer," said Jack.

"If this hot weather lasts, we'll have a fine harvest," pursued Keziah.

"No telling what the weather 'll be—we've had a long spell of dry," said Jack.

"They say pork will be scarce," said Keziah.

And so on.

"Oh Ben!" I whispered, "what a dreadful life to lead! Never to have any other ideas, than about pork, and crops, and buying and selling! And these people are going to marry each other; and day after day, they will go on talking about pork and crops, and things at so much a hundred, till they die!"

"That is their way of being happy, I suppose," said Ben. "They would like the same sort of heaven as poor Betsey Lake. She wanted to keep a pig in heaven, you know."

"Ah yes!" I laughed; "and that reminds me of Mr. Gascoign. Oh! how he *will* blame us."

"How I wish we knew what is going on at home, and whether they are trying to find us," said Ben.

"Oh no, for certain," I replied. "There is no one there to give the alarm. Papa is away, all the servants gone, Miss Gascoign not there; and Aunt Jem only anxious for

our absence. Even if nurse disobeyed us, and urged Aunt Jem to hunt us out, Aunt Jem wouldn't. Depend upon it, no alarm will be raised till Father comes back; and Aunt Jem will be married and off before then."

"The darling Governor!" sighed Ben. And I echoed his sigh.

Amidst all our waywardness, all our rebellion, deep down in our very heart of hearts, lay this passionate love for our father.

"Oh, the darling Governor!" I murmured, after a little fit of sad musing, "if we could but see him now!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PLEASANTLY sped the time at the Crown and Anchor. All through the day, we laughed and talked and sang, as though no sorrow could befall us, as though life were one nectar-filled goblet, to be freely quaffed, without one bitter drop. Freely, we ran out into the fresh and fragrant morning air; freely, we basked in the sultry noontide; freely, we lingered in the dewy evening, and watched the shadows gathering, as the stars one by one woke up, and the moon floated, soft and shy, over the dusky woods, then sailed up, higher and higher, into the deep blue air, and fell in broad and sparkling radiance upon the river. It was all so sweet—so lovely; and I think the sense of perfect freedom, added its own peculiar charm. And so we lingered on, till a fortnight had passed, and we were still at Kimberton, at the Crown and Anchor.

Somehow, we had fallen into the homely way of the villagers around, and had learnt to call our good hostess, "Mother," and I begged her never to address me as "Miss." So she always said, "Dears," or "Children," when she spoke to us; and we were content.

But when this happy time had lasted for a fortnight, I said to Ben,—

"We ought to go, Ben. Our bill here, reckoning it at only a pound a day each, must be £28. Oh dear! what *shall* we do? Living is so expensive!"

Ben sighed regretfully.

"I could stop here for ever,—if—if—" He paused, and looked rather timidly at me.

"If what, Ben?" I asked.

"If only—don't be vexed, Winnie, darling!" pleaded the dear little fellow.

"No, no, why should I?" I interrupted, "when I feel it too! You were going to say, 'If only the dear Governor were here.' Ah yes, Ben, it is very dreadful not to know where he is—whether he is angry with us!"

"It troubles me!" said Ben, with quivering lip. "And then, poor old nurse—and Pearl and Vixen, and the precious kittums!"

"It is very, very sad!" I sighed. "Oh! that horrid

woman, to have made all this mischief! Papa need not have married for the sake of peace and quiet, since Aunt Jem is going to take herself off. We should have been so happy together! But now, when we go back, there will be constant war whenever we are not at school!"

"I shall soon be old enough to have a house of my own," said Ben, manfully, "and we will live together, and no one shall ever trouble you, darling."

I only sighed; that blessed time seemed such a long way off. Meanwhile, here we were, two poor little vagrants, run away from home, doomed to return there for punishment when our funds were exhausted. So, that brought me back to our original topic;—how much did we owe Mrs. Thatcher? I thought we might as well ask her at once; so I rang the little hand-bell, and that failing to bring her, we had recourse to our usual expedient, of both bawling out "Mother," at the top of our voices, till she came.

"I was at the bottom of the orchard, and thought I heard you call, dears," said the good soul.

"Oh! what a pity!" I said, "what we had to say would have kept."

—"May as well say it now, dears," she replied. "What is it?"

—"Only that we must leave. We are so sorry—" I faltered.

"Must you, dears?" she said, evidently troubled by the announcement. "I thought you were so happy here."

"And so we are!" cried Ben, "oh! it is dreadful—dreadful, to have to go—to be amongst strangers again!"

—"And to leave you, Mother! Oh, *don't* forget us! don't! dont!" I cried. I gave way. It was a great wrench, to have to leave this good soul.

"Forget you, you little dear! No indeed! But why must you go? Can't you stay a bit longer."

"I'm afraid not—I think not," I said, glancing towards Ben.

"No;" he replied, "we *ought* to go. We *must* go."

"Well, if you *ought* to go, you must, and I won't say a word against it," said Mrs. Thatcher.

"We are so glad you don't want to part with us," I faltered, through my tears. "If you knew how dreadfully sorry we are, to leave—"

"When must you go, dears?" she asked, very softly.

"Not to-morrow!—Oh, not to-morrow, Winnie!" pleaded

Ben, throwing his arms round Mrs. Thatcher's neck, and kissing away the tear that had fallen upon her cheek.

"The day after to-morrow," I said, with a great effort. "And so, Mother, as it must be (but we shall never forget you, and we *will* come back here some day!) please, do let us know what we owe you."

"Will to-morrow morning do?" asked Mrs. Thatcher.

Receiving our reply in the affirmative, she left us, looking very down-hearted.

"We will come back some day, and bring her beautiful presents, won't we Ben?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered; "Oh! wouldn't it be dreadful, to find she was dead? One does read of such things."

"They don't often happen," I observed, "and I should think Mrs. Thatcher not likely to die; this is such a healthy place."

"If we have not enough money to pay our bill!" said Ben. "If it were to be much more than we think!"

"We should have to promise to send it when we went home," I said; "but I don't suppose it will be more."

The next morning solved our doubts. On the breakfast-table was laid a document—the bill. I glanced at the sum total.

"What!" I exclaimed.

"What!" exclaimed Ben also, when he looked at it.

"A mistake! She has left out a naught," I said.

"Yes," that must be it," said Ben; "and even that won't make up the £28 we expected.

I rang the hand-bell; and Mrs. Thatcher, being this time within hearing, appeared.

"You have made a mistake, Mother," I said, holding out the bill.

"Have I, dear? No, I think not. But if you think it too much, pay what you can afford, and I shall never miss it."

"But it is *all* a mistake from beginning to end," I said. "You have left out a naught. You mean £20. We thought it would have been £28.

"Bless the innocent children!" exclaimed Mrs. Thatcher, laughing till she cried, "they're not fit to go about alone! Why, where did they get such notions from?"

"But please to look at the bill," pleaded Ben. "You have actually charged only £2—instead of £20."

"Well, dear, and how much more should I charge, unless

I was a jew swindler, I've charged a pound a week for the two, for board and lodging; and it's plenty."

—"But all the trouble we have given, and the chickens, and the bacon, and ham, and oh! the trout, and all that butter—" Ben was saying. I interrupted with,—

"And those heaps of milk, and eggs, and miles of lovely cream, and tea, and oh! the home-made bread!"

"And those cakes!" ejaculated Ben.

"And those beautiful bed-rooms of ours!" I continued, "and the attendance, and table linen, and apples and plums and pears, and salt, and soap, and mustard, and—oh! ever so much! You must have forgotten to charge for heaps of things!" I said.

"No, dear," said good 'Mother,' "I haven't forgotten anything, and I have charged quite enough. I'm glad you don't think it too much, that's all."

Ben jumped up and clapped his hands, crying, "Then we shall not have to go yet! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" and seizing 'Mother' by both hands, he whirled her round and round, till she turned giddy, and fell panting on the sofa. I laughed, partly at the sight of poor stout, rosy, breathless Mrs. Thatcher, partly out of pure delight at the thought of not having to leave Kimberton just yet.

"That was the reason, Mother," said Ben; "we were afraid of getting into debt."

"Why, how much did you think I should charge you, you poor silly little dears?" asked good 'Mother.'

"A pound a day, each," I replied.

"Why, good gracious!" ejaculated Mrs. Thatcher, "I must have fed you on gold and precious stones, to have charged so much as that! Why, if Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria was to come here in her royal coach, drawn by eight Arab steeds, with her jewelled crown upon her head, I couldn't charge her at that rate!—No, not unless I was a regular jew swindler, my dears!"

"We shall stay here for ever so long, Ben," I said. "Where could we be so happy?"

"No indeed!" said Ben; "I could stay here all my life!"

Mrs. Thatcher caught him in her arms; then, her lip quivered, her face twitched, and she ran out of the room.

"Isn't she good?" from me.

"Isn't she a brick?" from Ben.

"Don't we love her?" from me.

"How can we ever go?" from Ben.

From the last remark, sprang a brilliant idea. Forthwith up spake I.

"Ben! An idea!"

"Yes."

"Why shouldn't 'Mother' accompany us—go on a little tour—at our expense, you know—as our guest?"

"Oh!" sighed Ben, in a sort of rapture, "that *would* be most high and festive larks!"

"Then the thing is done!" I sententiously remarked. "Ring the bell, Ben."

The bell was rung accordingly, and Mrs. Thatcher appeared, with red eyes, and swollen cheeks. We both seized upon her, and with some violence forced her down upon the sofa.

"Mother," said Ben; and then looked at me, and stopped.

"Mother," said I; and then looked at Ben, and stopped.

"What is it, dears?" she asked, in her good simple way.

"This," I replied. "We want you to come with us, on our travels, as our friend and guest."

"Me!" exclaimed the good soul, in utter astonishment. "*Me?*"

"Why not? dear old darling Mother?" asked Ben, with both his arms round her, and his bright young face gazing up pleadingly into hers.

"Bless the dear child! he doesn't know what he's talking about!" exclaimed the good Mother. "To think of the Crown and Anchor without *me?* Besides, you said you weren't going now, dears."

"Not now," I said, "but we can't stay *much* longer, because —because—"

"Not because of money, eh children?" she asked. "Don't think of that! You're welcome to the bite and sup, as long as you choose to stay here. It will be a sad day for me, when the Crown and Anchor sees the last of you. I had a little lad once—many years ago—and this little lad has the look of him. It will be like losing him again."

"Then come with us, Mother," I urged.

"Ah! I couldn't leave the Crown and Anchor, my dear: it could'nt get on without me." And she shook her head.

"Jack and Keziah could manage," pleaded Ben.

"After they're married, may be," replied 'Mother;' "if you would stop till then."

"Oh no! you naughty sly Mother!" scolded Ben. "As if you didn't know that Jack and Keziah would have to be away on their wedding tour!"

"Poor folks don't have wedding tours, my dear," argued Mrs. Thatcher. "But anyway, the Crown and Anchor couldn't get on without me."

We sighed. She resumed.

"But why talk of going?"

"Because," I replied, rather hesitatingly, "because—to speak plainly—we are afraid of being tracked, if we stop too long in one place."

"Poor dears! But it is a sore thing to think upon, this running away! A many things might happen to two poor innocent lambs like you! You're not safe—no young people are, away from their own home."

"But we could not stop there," I remonstrated. "That tyrant of a step-mother!"

"Was she *very* cruel?" asked 'Mother' in pitying accents.

"No, she hadn't the chance," I answered. "We ran away before she came back from the wedding tour with Father."

"What is she like, dears?"

"We don't know," said Ben; "we haven't seen her yet. We think she has a sharp nose, and fierce eyes, and wheedling, humbugging ways."

"Dear! dear! to be sure!" ejaculated Mrs. Thatcher.

"And we know her to be a mischief-making, designing woman," was my charitable remark.

"But you must go back some day, dears," said Mrs. Thatcher.

"We haven't quite decided," said Ben. "We may decide upon going abroad."

"How, dear?"

"I might go as cabin boy, and Winnie as stewardess."

I demurred. "When stewardesses are dreadfully sea-sick, who waits upon them?"

"Oh! they never are sea-sick," said Mrs. Thatcher. "They wouldn't be stewardesses if they were."

"Then if I were a stewardess, I should not be sea-sick, of course," was my logical reply.

"But suppose the stewardess *were* sea-sick?" persisted Ben.

"Oh, *then*, the storm would be so dreadful, that the ship would go to the bottom, and the stewardess wouldn't be wanted to wait upon the sick people," said Mrs. Thatcher.

"I think I would rather not be a stewardess," I remarked, with abated ardour.

"Well, dears," continued Mrs. Thatcher, "if I were you, I should go home after a bit, and try and make the best of things. You have a dear good Pa, you have told me many a time—"

"And a darling old nurse," put in Ben.

"Yes, dear, and a nice home. You had better go home after a bit, dears, depend upon it."

"But the ogre of a woman!" I pleaded.

"Depend upon it, dears, your good Pa won't see you put upon. And who knows what a comfort you might be to your dear Pa if she is cruel to him.

"Oh! if she dare!" I exclaimed.

"Then you won't come away with us?" asked Ben.

"No, dear, I couldn't be easy in my mind, away from the Crown and Anchor, and so I can't leave. I don't say but what I might, if you got sick, or in trouble."

"Would you come then, dear old Mother?" asked Ben.

"Yes, my boy. If I got a letter, or a Telegraph message to say you were ill, off I'd go at once—(be sure of that, dear!—) off I'd go, and nurse you, my lamb!"

"Is there a telegraph here?" I asked.

"Oh yes, to be sure," she replied. "The railway is only two miles off!"

We were astonished; it had seemed such an immense way the morning we arrived. But she told us there was a station much nearer than that.

And so we decided to stay yet awhile at Thatcher's, Crown and Anchor, Kimberton.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was Sunday; and, at the Crown and Anchor, Sunday meant, everyone in his or her best clothes, everyone in his and her best spirits, and a pleasant drive in the tax cart to the church, three miles off. At least, that was the Thatcher's Sunday—not ours, for we had no best clothes, and we feared going to church, because we were in hiding, and dared not show ourselves.

But this Sunday—the second after we had decided on staying on at Kimberton—Mrs. Thatcher returned to the room after removing the breakfast things, and said,—

"You'll excuse me, dears, and not think I'm making too bold—" And then she stuck fast, looking very bashful.

"Oh you ridiculous old Mother! what's the matter now?" asked Ben.

"Well, my dear, I thought I'd just ask whether you wouldn't like to go to church this blessed Sabbath morning. God is so good, to send us this beautifnl weather, and all the other good things we have every day. We ought to thank Him, and to let other people see that we do."

"We are afraid to go to church," I replied; "we might be recognized and captured."

"Not all this long way from home," argued Mrs. Thatcher.

"Could we drive there with you?" asked Ben. "Oh! what fun!"

"Yes, dear," replied 'Mother;' "and it is such a pleasant drive. Do come!"

"If I were quite sure—" I said, half yielding.

"Oh yes—do go, Winnie, darling!" pleaded Ben.

"But we have no clothes fit for church," I replied.

"As if the ones you have on aren't fit for *any* company!" exclaimed Mother.

"It would be such a pity if it led to our detection," I said.

"Oh! it won't! it won't! Do go, Winnie," entreated Ben.

"Well, we will risk it then, Mother. Thank you, for asking us," I decided.

"The cart will be at the door in half an hour. You're not too proud to ride in a two-wheel—, eh dears?" asked Mother.

"The idea!" I exclaimed. "It will be the greatest fun!"

In half an hour we were lifted into the "two-wheel," in company with Mrs. Thatcher, Keziah, and Jack, who drove. We bowled along gaily, through the prettiest country; along high roads, through lanes, beside a river, through a valley, till at last we came to a village, and, turning round a corner, a pretty old church, half buried in trees, was before us. We all alighted. Mrs. Thatcher went first, to show the way. We stuck close to her, feeling rather timid. Keziah brought up the rear. Jack stayed behind, to put up the horse in some neighbouring stable.

Hardly daring to lift my eyes, I yet saw that it was a dear old-fashioned church, with high pews, such as my soul loveth to this very day. Some fine old stained glass windows, deeply sunk in thick walls, threw a mellow dusky light over everything. There was no glare; all was solemn and subdued. Here, one's brain felt rested. Here, one could pray.

And here, in the quiet, soft half-light, I felt a sense of repose, a resting from the wild excitement of the last month. As the old familiar words of the service floated softly through the church, I fell to longing for home, to wondering how I ever could have left it. I could hardly believe that I, Winnie Travers, was there in that strange church, among strange people, while my dear Father was in the old pew at home, thinking of us, perhaps, cut to the heart at the thought of our ingratitude. I could have cried out aloud in my anguish, and when the organ gave forth the well remembered notes, I felt as though in a wretched heart-breaking dream, and, struggle as I might, my tears welled over, and fell drop by drop upon my book. I was then just beginning to awaken to a dim sense of what I had done—of all I had lost. Alas! I little thought what had happened even then! Still less did I dream of what was to come!

At last the service was over. The sermon commenced. Looking up towards the preacher, my heart gave a little leap of terror. I thought he was not unknown to me. Glancing towards Ben, I found that he, too, recognized one who was not an entire stranger. But where, or when, I had seen that face, I could not for the life of me remember. Only, it seemed to me that his eyes rested inquiringly on our pew; but that might be no more than the usual amount of curiosity excited by the presence of strangers in a village church. However, I was seized with a panic, and so was Ben; and the sermon,

turning upon the duty of children to their parents, in nowise tended to allay our fears. Glad were we both, when the sermon came to an end, and we filed out of church; still more glad, when we again found ourselves bowling along the road on our way home. Ben and I sat side by side in the cart, and talked in an under-tone.

"Where have we met him, Ben?"

"I can't remember, dear. As soon as I saw him, I thought of the Rectory at home, and Miss Gascoign, and another lady—"

—"Just what *I* was reminded of, Ben. But why didn't he make us think of Mr. Gascoign, too?"

"I can't imagine, Winnie, dear; but it is very dreadful."

"We shall have to bolt, Ben."

Then there was a long silence, till we arrived at the Crown and Anchor. Alas! Alas! the pretty peaceful little inn could no longer shelter us! We must go! I was ready to cry with vexation.

When Mrs. Thatcher brought in dinner, I asked her the name of the clergyman, and she replied, that it was 'Gascoign.' Ben and I started to our feet.

"Oh Mother, we must go at once! we are not safe here!" cried Ben.

"What! do you know the parson?" asked our landlady.

"I remember it all now, Winnie," Ben almost sobbed. "He came to do duty for Mr. Gascoign while he was away, and his wife was with him, and they stayed at the rectory. He is Mr. Gascoign's cousin. I remember."

"Yes, yes," I assented, in despairing accents.

"Oh Mother! Mother! you will stand by us? won't you?" pleaded Ben. "You won't let us be taken?"

"No, indeed, my lamb," responded the kind soul. "They shan't lay a finger upon you here, so sure as my name's Susan Thatcher!"

"But if he comes?" I suggested.

"I'll put him off the scent, dears,—yes, even if I tell a lie for it."

"Perhaps he did not know us," I pleaded.

"Most like he didn't," replied Mrs. Thatcher, consolingly.

So we settled down to our dinner, trying to think that we had needlessly alarmed ourselves. As the afternoon wore on, we became still more reassured, and at last were able to smile over our recent panic. We sat at the window, lazily watching the

poultry, as they scuttled about, foraging for provisions, fighting and making it up, clucking, crowing, screaming by turns.

"Oh, do look at Keziah's 'get up,'" whispered Ben, as that young betrothed person issued from the inn porch, in company with her affianced, both dressed in their 'best Sunday going,' and prepared for their usual Sunday afternoon walk.

"How much better those people look, in their everyday things," I observed. "What a guy Keziah has made of herself! That pink muslin, much too short, and that ridiculous scarf, and that odious bonnet on the back of her head, and those high-heeled boots."

"And oh, Winnie! Jack's hat! Did you *ever* see anything so tall? Where can he have bought it?"

By this time the couple had got to some little distance along the road. A solitary horseman passed them, and nodded. Jack touched his tall hat; Keziah bobbed.

"A traveller, I suppose," said I; "I wonder if he will put up here?"

"Oh no," replied Ben; "only some one riding past."

But the traveller made straight for the Crown and Anchor, and we began to think he meant to put up there after all. A little way off, the road took a sudden bend, which hid him for an instant from our sight. At that moment Mrs. Thatcher dashed into the room, and exclaiming, "the Parson!" seized us both by the shoulders, and, pushing us into a large empty cupboard, turned the key upon us, and took it out, just as we heard the horse's steps stop at the inn door. The next minute, the rider had entered the room with Mrs. Thatcher.

Ben and I grasped each other's hands in speechless terror. I was afraid the dreadful man would hear my heart beat. I felt suffocating. But dear little Ben, trying to conquer his own terror, gently slid his arm round me, and softly stroked my hand. Then we listened.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you to-day, Mrs. Thatcher."

"No intrusion at all, Sir; you are always welcome," was the discreet reply.

"But," he resumed, "two young people were in your pew to-day—"

"Oh yes, my nephew and niece Sir, from Ashdown. They have been here since Monday."

"Umph!" he mused. "Can I see them?"

"They left by the two o'clock train, Sir," (Oh! dear kind fibbing soul!)

"Ah! ahem!—I am afraid you are deceiving me, Mrs. Thatcher."

"Oh Sir, why should I deceive you?"

"Through mistaken kindness. A friend of mine—or rather of my cousin's—has lost his two children, a boy and a girl; they have run away from home. My cousin, Mr. Gascoign, has mentioned this in a letter. I have never heard you speak of this nephew and niece; and it strikes me that the young lady and gentleman whom I saw in church this morning, are the two children—whom I saw at my brother's, about six months ago."

How ever that dear good soul contrived to string together such a number of fibs as she thereupon poured forth, was more than we could understand; but the Rector had to appear convinced; and so he took his leave, and we soon heard the sound of his horse's retreating footsteps, patter, patter, patter, on the hard road, till it died away in the distance. Then Mrs. Thatcher came and released us.

"Poor little things!" she exclaimed, "it *was* a narrow escape. God forgive me for all the lies I've been telling; and on Sunday, too!"

"How soon can we get away?" I breathlessly asked.

"You *must* go?" she faltered.

"Yes, dear kind Mother, we must go," I sorrowfully replied; "that man will come back, or else telegraph home."

"We *must* go!" sadly echoed poor Ben.

"There's a train to-night, dears—at eight o'clock," 'Mother' reluctantly admitted.

"How long will it take us to walk to the station?" I asked.

"'Walk' indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Thatcher; "the tax cart isn't worthy to hold you, dears! I wish it was a carriage and four—I do!—But if you'll put up with it, I'll drive you to the station. The Parson must be at church to do the service; so there's no fear of our meeting him."

And so it was settled, and we felt very miserable. The good Mother hovered about us all the rest of the time, and seemed as if she could not bear to lose sight of us for a moment. We packed up our little bundles, and strapped them neatly as before. Then I asked 'Mother' to let me have the bill.

But she demurred, called us "her poor darlings!" "her

own dear lambs!" and the like, and begged us "not to vex poor old mother by treating her like a common inn-keeper," etc. But we told her, we didn't want her to think we ever *could* pay her back for all her kindness, for that could never be paid highly enough; only we did not want to impose upon her. It took a great deal of persuasion; but at last she gave in, and so we paid our little bill, and sat all three together on the sofa.

"Oh, my dears," then said the good Mother, "why not think twice over it? Why go away further from your dear Pa? Go home, dears—go home, before worse happen."

"He doesn't want us," I replied, half proudly, half sorrowfully. "He has that hateful woman to console him."

"How do you know he *is* consoled, dear? He may be unhappy—yes, ill, for all you know."

"Poor Father!" sighed Ben.

I hesitated; but pride conquered.

"Well," I said, "we won't go back now, because they would say we were afraid the parson here would make us. We will stay away a few weeks later, and then go home of our own accord."

"I hope no harm will come of it," sighed Mrs. Thatcher.

The appearance of the tax cart at the door, put a stop to further discussion. We were soon off. It seemed like a rapid dreadful dream—like a few moments only—before we got to the station. Mrs. Thatcher took our tickets, having first deposited us in a carriage. Then she leant in at our window, holding our hands, her good and comely face working and quivering. The engine was attached, the train began to move; the porter gently pulled her back. We were off.

We sprang forward, and leant out of the window to see the last of 'Mother.' She was running alongside of the train; and she shouted out the word, "Write."—In return, we bawled "Yes," as loud as we could. Then 'Mother' nodded and smiled, to show that she had heard, and then she took a fresh start after us. But we were going quicker by this time, and then we suddenly plunged into a tunnel. The last thing we beheld before we were in darkness, was Mother, running after the train as fast as she could, waving and kissing her hands.

And when we came into the light at the other end of the tunnel, Ben's face was hidden in the cushions, and he was sobbing as if his heart would break.

CHAPTER XX.

THROUGH that night journey we hardly slept for crying, and for thinking of poor 'Mother,' and of the dear old Crown and Anchor; so that when we arrived at our destination the next morning, we were fairly worn out, and, after having some breakfast, went to bed, and slept till far into the day.

When we met, it was only to grumble at everything. We were in a good-sized Hotel in a middling-sized town. Everything was dingy and dusky, after the bright little inn at bright little Kimberton. Our sitting-room was dingy; the walls were the colour of bad pea soup; the chair covers were of a bilious drab; the curtains matched the chair covers; the carpet bore a dingy blue pattern, on a ground of faded yellow —also bilious. There was a stuffy, unventilated smell in the room, as if the carpet were never taken up, and the windows never opened, and as if potatoes were always being boiled, served, and eaten, in that room, every day all through the year.

"What shall we do?" I asked.

"Go out," replied Ben, "and buy some letter paper, and write to 'Mother.'"

Which we did accordingly; sallying forth into the strange town, staring into the shop windows, losing our way, and forgetting the name of our hotel, which we at last only discovered through coming upon it by accident, and recognizing the landlord, who looked as bilious as his furniture, as he stood on his own door-step.

In our own room once more, we sat down to write to 'Mother.' And this was the letter.

"DEAR OLD MOTHER,

"We have arrived here safely and it is very nasty and horrid and the coffee was smoky and the milk was half water and the butter was beastly and the eggs were pigly.

"WINNIE."

"And the landlord looks so nasty not like the dear

Crown and Anker and we miss you so dreadfly and we should have liked to have stoped with you for ever.

"BEN."

"And we hope you wont forget us dear good Mother. Some day we shall come back to the dear Crown and Anchor.

"WINNIE."

"And we shall write to you again very soon.

"BEN."

"So goodbye darling kind old Mother. Thank you so very much for everything.

"WINNIE. "BEN."

"We will go out presently to post it," said Ben. "Till then, hadn't we better do our accounts?"

"Ah, yes," I sighed; "we must begin accounts again, now that we have left the Crown and Anchor."

"First, then," said Ben, "our railway fare to here."

"Ah! that reminds me," I said, diving into my pocket, "'Mother' put the change into my hand as we were moving off. Here it is, wrapped up in paper, just as she gave it."

We opened the paper, and found it contained some loose money—our change,—and several pounds in gold, wrapped up in a little note from poor 'Mother.' Evidently she had written it at the Crown and Anchor, just before starting. It ran thus:

"DEAR YOUNG LADY,

"Please don't think I make too bold in returning your money for your living at the Crown and Anchor. I couldn't take money from two children like you. You may want it, dear Miss Winnie, or you may not, but please don't think I make too bold.

"With my humble duty to you and Master Ben.

"Your obedient Servant,

"SUSAN THATCHER."

And then I gave way, and, flinging my arms upon the table, laid my head upon them, and wept.

"Don't fret, Winnie, darling," said my dear Ben; "we will go back and see her, the first minute we can."

But still I could not be comforted. I was so touched by the delicate kindness of this poor working woman. Even while

conferring so great a benefit, she addressed us as 'Miss Winnie' and 'Master Ben,' and signed herself 'your obedient servant.'

As soon as I could calm myself, I added a postscript:—

"P.S.—Oh you dear kind Mother! we have just found the money you have returned to us. We are not too proud to take that, or anything, from you. I shall sew it up in a bag, and stitch it inside my jacket, for a little 'nest egg,' in case our money runs short before we get home.

"Ben's best love and mine. Goodbye.

"WINNIE."

"P.S.—We will write again and tell you all our adventurs.

"BEN."

"P.S.—Everything here is *pigly*.

"BEN."

"P.S.—Aspeshly the butter, and eggs and bread and milk and tea and the room and the carpet and the furnetur and the landlord and

"P.S.—Winnie says I musn't write any more P.S—es.

"BEN."

We disliked this hotel so much, that we resolved to post our letter, have a little luncheon, and then take the train to—— where?

This was a puzzler.

"Let us go to the sea-side," suggested Ben. "The sea-side must be stunning, now. Fancy, how jolly, to lie on the beach, and throw stones into the water!"

"But how shall we get there?" I asked. "We don't know where to take the tickets for."

"Let's ring, and ask for a Bradshaw," said Ben with great promptitude.

Forthwith, Bradshaw was rung for, and brought; but we seemed no nearer the goal of our wishes than before, inasmuch as Bradshaw did not mention which places were sea-side places.

"I know!" I exclaimed. "We will ask the waiter."

When that functionary appeared, I put on my most aged look, and said, "Bradshaw is such a trouble to understand. Would you be kind enough to tell me the name of some nice little quiet sea-side place; very, *very* quiet."

So he told me, finding it for me in that book of mystery; and I kept my thumb upon the name till he had left the room, and then wrote it down. After that, there was nothing more to be done but have luncheon, and order a fly to take us to the station.

"What shall we have for luncheon?" I asked; "something wholesome and feeding, so that we shan't feel hungry again for a long time."

"And something easily cooked," added Ben, "for everything here is horrible. Suppose we say roast beef—sirloin?"

"Or leg of mutton! That is simple," said I.

"Yes—capital," replied Ben. "What a good manager you are, Winnie!"

"We won't have any fish," I continued; "I fancy it would take too long to cook, and would be sure to be horridly done."

"Nor soup," said Ben.

"No, just a little apple cream, or something of that sort."

So we rang the bell, and I ordered a roast leg of mutton, and an apple cream tart. Then we sallied forth to post our letter, lost our way, and returned to the hotel in about an hour.

"Is luncheon ready?" I asked.

"No, Miss; won't be ready for another hour or more," replied the waiter.

"What dilatory people!" I exclaimed, when he had left the room.

"How long does a leg of mutton take to roast?" asked Ben.

"I should think, about half an hour, or three-quarters, if the fire is a great roaring one, and the mutton is put close to it, and made to twirl round *very* fast. I believe a great deal depends upon the twirling."

"When we live together—when I am a man, what a good housekeeper you will be, Winnie! What nice dinners we will have! And you are such a good manager, that you will make the money last well. Do you think we shall be rich?"

"No, dear," I sighed. "That ogre of a woman is sure to keep all the dear Governor's money to herself."

"Oh! the poor Governor!" said Ben. "I hope she is kind to him."

"I don't!" I passionately exclaimed. "I want him to hate her; and he won't do that, if she is nice to him."

"But," argued Ben, "I hope she won't be nasty to him while we are away."

"*I* do!" I again rejoined. "Then he will long to have us back; and perhaps he will put that advertisement in the 'Times,' begging us to come back."

"Oh dear! dear!" cried Ben, clasping his hands; "perhaps he *has* put it in, and we have never seen it!"

This was appalling. At once I rang the bell, and asked for a copy of the 'Times.' It was brought, but no such advertisement as we expected, appeared.

"Ah no! he is happy without us!" sighed Ben.

"Perhaps he *did* put advertisements in the paper, and we didn't see them, you know," I suggested.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" said Ben; "and the dear Governor thinks we don't care about him and our dear home—our dear home!"

The poor little fellow's face quivered painfully as he faltered out the last words. Drawing him towards me, I sadly replied,

"Yes, our dear home! How I long to see it again!"

"Shall we go back? Oh, *say* we shall!" he gasped.

"No, dear," I mournfully answered; "not till we are sure he wants us. We should do no good by going back, unless we were welcome."

Ah! woe is me! How could I forget all those years of unfailing love, from our dear father, whose only fault was, that he saw no blemishes in me, his ungrateful child!

Ben tightly compressed his lip, as if to choke down all rebellious feelings, and then, raising his dear bright face towards mine, said,—

"As you please, Winnie, darling. I love you better even than our blessed home."

"But Ben, might not *we* put in an advertisement?"

"Oh Winnie!" ejaculated the little boy, in a rapture of delight.

"We might say," I answered, "'Winnie and Ben are quite well and comfortable, and have plenty of money; but they long to know how their dear father is.'"

"Yes, and then he would answer," exclaimed Ben, with clasped hands.

"Of course he would, dear; and we would add: "'We will look into the 'Times' this day week, and hope there will be an answer.'"

"Oh Winnie! how clever of you!" cried Ben.

"Let us go off at once, and put in the advertisement," I said.

"Where? How?" asked Ben.

This was a damper; but I was equal to the emergency.

"Ask the waiter," I replied. And Ben rang the bell.

"I want to put an advertisement into the 'Times,'" I said, screwing up all the dignity I could. "What is the way to do it?"

"You can either do it through a stationer, or else send postage stamps, Miss," was the reply.

"How many?" I asked.

"Depends upon the advertisement, Miss. So many words, for so much. A stationer would tell you. Luncheon will be ready, directly, Miss."

So we retired to "clean ourselves," as we called it, and, on returning to the sitting room, found the waiter fussing about, laying the cloth for luncheon, which soon appeared.

The leg of mutton looked inviting; but oh! horror of horrors! who was to carve it? We had not thought of that! Ben and I glanced at each other in mute consternation. There was a dreadful pause. I saw the corners of Ben's mouth twitching, and knew that the naughty boy would burst out laughing in another minute, before the solemn waiter; so, putting on my most elderly manner, I said to that official, "You need not wait, as it is only luncheon."

And he withdrew.

Then we burst into one continuous roar of laughter at our own expense; and when this safety-valve had a little relieved our feelings, we gazed ruefully at the unconscious object of our trouble.

"Beast of a leg!" I vituperated. "Why ever did we think of having a joint?"

"What shall we do?" responded Ben, with a comical expression.

"Can't imagine," I rejoined.

"Shall we ring for the waiter, 'make a clean breast of it,' and ask him to carve?" asked Ben.

"Never! perish the thought!" I exclaimed, in imitation of a provincial tragic actor, whom we had once seen perform; and, brandishing the carving-knife and fork over the obnoxious joint, I added, "here goes!" and drove the fork deep into the leg, with a force which sent it flying off the dish, and deluged the table-cloth with rich brown gravy.

Ben came to the rescue, stopped the headlong career of the

lively leg, and, restoring it to its proper resting place, scraped up the gravy with a spoon, and basted the joint therewith.

"What *will* he think?" I lamented.

"Oh, never mind; he will never see us after to-day," replied Ben the consoler. "Now, try again, Winnie. Isn't it fun?"

But that unhappy leg wouldn't stay still to be carved. If it was half as active when on its native downs, as now, its owner must have been a remarkably lively animal.

"I'll tell you what, Winnie," said Ben. "Let me hold it down hard, with two forks, while you harpoon it firmly with the carving fork; then you will be able to carve."

Acting on this advice, I managed to cut some slices. It was done in some fear and trembling, and took some time; for, on the least sound, we wrenched out our implements, and sat down, expecting the waiter to enter the room. The slices were rather unequal, being either shavings or lumps; but Ben pronounced the mutton delicious; and we both managed to make a good dinner, or luncheon as we called it. The apple cream tart, which followed, was easily carved; and when that was finished, we rose, and donned our hats, in preparation for a sortie to the stationer's.

We found one without difficulty, and sent off our advertisement, which he told us would appear the next day but one.

"Wednesday, that will be," I said; "let us remember Wednesday, Ben."

Then we went back to the hotel, rang the bell, ordered the bill, and asked when the next train would start for the place we had decided upon.

The solemn waiter, after consulting Bradshaw, informed us that there would be no train till seven o'clock; so we decided to have some tea before starting, and directed him to get a cab for us, in time to catch that train.

The time passed slowly, but came to an end at last, and we found ourselves once more whirled along by the great iron horse; and again we flew past trees and houses, and cottages and fields, and stations; and he screamed and panted, and puffed, and snorted, and we swayed and grated, and jolted and rattled.

"This must be the express," I said.

"Yes, dear, I heard some one say it was," replied Ben, in sleepy accents.

I, too, was very drowsy. Before long, Ben had dropped

off; I was not slow to follow his example, and fell fast asleep, with my head against the side of the carriage.

I suppose we must have slept for two or three hours, when we were suddenly awoke by the stoppage of the train, and found that we had come to a station. It was dark; lights were gleaming, and one porter was calling out something.

I shook Ben, and he started up.

"Quick, Ben!" I cried; "we are here! Quick! or we shall be taken on!"

We grasped our bundles, and, scrambling out of the carriage, stood, blinking and dazed, upon the platform. The next minute, the train was off.

"Only just in time," I cried. "Oh Ben, how dreadful to have gone on!"

"I don't see the sea," said Ben.

"Of course not, you silly boy!" I rejoined. "How could you, in the dark!" I laughed, but Ben was half asleep, poor little fellow.

"Come, wake up!" I said, "and call a cab."

But all the cabs—if there were any—had gone, and there we stood forlornly upon the platform, with our two little bundles.

A respectable looking man—the station-master, I supposed—came towards us, and asked whether we expected to be met.

"Oh no, sir," replied Ben; "we want a cab to take us to an hotel—one as near the sea as possible, if you please."

"The sea, my dear? there is no sea within twenty miles of this!"

Thereupon, tired, sleepy, hungry, I gave way, and burst into tears.

"Have you come wrong, my dears?" asked the kind station-master.

"Oh yes!" I sobbed; "we were going to the sea-side, and we fell asleep (it was so wrong of us!) and we woke suddenly, and thought we had come to the place—"

And, again, I wept pathetically.

"Poor Winnie!" said Ben, "don't cry! I am sure it will be all right. Perhaps this is a very nice place."

"But it isn't the sea-side!" I wailed.

"Never mind, dear, we shall get there some day. She has never been used to travel alone, sir," he added; "and she is so tired!"

"Well," replied the good-natured man, "you, both, come along with me to the 'Swan.' You can stop there to-night; and, to-morrow, you can go on."

The 'Swan' was not far off; and when we found ourselves comfortably seated in a small room, with a little supper spread before us by a quiet looking servant girl, we began to laugh at our troubles, and rather to congratulate ourselves upon our mistake.

By the time we had finished our supper, it was eleven o'clock, and we were glad to go to bed. I was too tired for any minute inspection of my room, but went to bed at once, and slept soundly till the next morning.

CHAPTER XXI.

A BRILLIANT flood of sunlight pouring into the room, awoke me to a sense of comfort and happiness. Springing out of bed, I swung open the window, for it was a lattice, and leant out.

I found myself in a bewildering tangle of roses and honeysuckle, the sweet perfume of which steeped the fresh warm morning air. Beneath, was a pretty garden, filled with bright and fragrant flowers, and traversed here and there by tiny paths. At the extreme end of the garden were some tall trees, which threw a refreshing shade over a little piece of turf, whereon was a rustic seat. It seemed to me, looking through the leafage, that fields or meadows lay beyond. The scent-laden air was filled with the song of birds, the blackbird's liquid notes being, to me, the sweetest of all. It was a heavenly morning. Existence was a pleasure. I felt bathed in happiness. Alas! these too, were some of the moments, so keenly remembered afterwards, when my great trouble plunged me into a darkness that might be felt!

I made haste to dress; but Ben was ready soonest, and out in the garden among the birds. There I joined him.

"Oh, Winnie, darling! isn't it lovely? isn't it sweet?" he exclaimed. "How fortunate, that we lost our way!"

"Yes, dear," I answered; "I don't think we need hurry away from here to-day."

"Oh no," he said, "we must go all over the garden, and into wherever it leads to, beyond; and we must explore the village—if there is one, and go for walks. Oh, no! we need not hurry away."

"I'm hungry," I said; "let us first have breakfast."

So, we returned to our parlour, and ordered breakfast, which we were too hungry to criticise. After that, we prepared to go out.

Out, through the garden, to the end; then through a gap in the hedge, into a field.

"Oh! how beautiful!" I exclaimed.

We stood upon a height. Beneath lay a valley. Beyond, hill upon hill stretched far away into the distance. We flung

ourselves down on the grass, hand in hand, and were silent, dumbstricken by the exquisite beauty of the scene.

Ben spoke first. "Winnie, is there such a thing as being too happy, do you think?"

"Perhaps, dear. But why?" I answered, in hushed accents.

"It seems as if—as if—" he hesitated.

"As if what, darling?"

"Sometimes, after I have had this sort of feeling—of being so very happy—some trouble has come—something I never looked for."

"You dear little goose! One would think you were quite an old person! As if a little boy ever had much trouble!"

But a vague uneasiness took possession of me. I felt almost impelled to clasp my little brother in my arms—I knew not why. He was gazing into the air before him, his bright, up-turned face, filled with a sort of dreamy beauty. He had a far-off look in his eyes, that made me shiver, I knew not why.

But in another moment, he had started to his feet, and dared me to run down the slope with him.

Down we ran, headlong; for, having once started, we could not stop. When we reached the bottom, we looked up to where we had been sitting.

"How steep!" I said. "It wasn't safe, Ben. I wouldn't do it again."

"It's just like our leaving home," mused Ben.

"How, dear?" I asked.

"We left home with such a rush—in such a hurry," sighed Ben. "Would we do it over again, Winnie?"

"I don't think so, dear," I sadly replied. "Oh! to see home again, and Father, and Nurse, and dear Pearl and the kitten!"

"If only we were sure the dear Governor wants us!" said Ben.

"Yes, dear; but we have no way of knowing," I replied.

Then we were silent. The thought of our home made us very sad. And so we resumed our way, along a little river, very pleasant to sound and sight, as it murmured, and lapped, and sparkled, and shimmered, between its banks of soft cool greenery, here and there quite over-arched by the trees which met from either side. And so we wandered on till we came to a gate.

"It won't open," I said, "we must get over it."

And here befell a dire calamity. In getting over the gate, my dress caught in a nail; and a great rent was the consequence!

"Oh dear! what *shall* I do?" I lamented. "I haven't a needle; if I had, I shouldn't know how to use it; and Nurse isn't here, nor Mrs. Thatcher! What shall I do?"

"Oh! what a pity!" exclaimed Ben, gazing ruefully at my dilapidated garment, which I had fondly hoped would never wear out.

"We must go back to the inn," I replied, quite crest-fallen. "Perhaps they can lend me a needle and thread; and I must try to mend it. What a pity, I never would learn to sew!"

So, back we turned, all the spirit taken out of us by this catastrophe; and, in comparative silence, we reached the inn, where I asked for a needle and thread, which was at once produced.

Having no change of dress, I had to mend it while on. The rent was large and jagged, and required more skilful darning than I was competent to bestow. When finished, it looked like a pucker, rather then a mend. I had much ado to keep from crying.

"I must look like a beastly tramp!" I dolefully ejaculated.

"No, you don't, Winnie darling; you *must* look like a lady, whatever you wear," said dear little Ben.

"A very tattered lady!" I replied, attempting to be jocose.

"When we come to a town, we will find out a proper stitching woman, and she will make it look as good as new," said Ben.

I doubted this. I felt quite subdued. My valour had departed for a season. Ben was disturbed, because I was discomfited.

"And what does it matter, what one looks like, in this out-of-the-way-place?" he went on. "Why, we didn't meet a soul, all the time we were out."

I was somewhat comforted. "I wish I knew how to sew," I said. "I see now, that every one ought to be able to sew, to be ready for any emergency like this."

"When we get home again, you can learn, Winnie dear," said Ben.

Home! the longing to be there once more, was growing stronger and stronger. But pride and self-will were, as yet, stronger than even my love of home. I needed a sharp and bitter lesson, a scourging even unto death, ere that pride and self-will could be brought low.

"Dinner—what about it?" asked Ben. "I'm starving—aren't you?"

"Yes, but we won't have another leg of mutton," I replied, "nor anything that takes long to cook, and is difficult to carve. Ring the bell, dear."

So Ben rang, and the sad, worn-out looking servant maid answered the summons.

"We want some dinner," I said. "What can we have?"

"I'll ask the Missis," was the reply, as she left the room.

"What a horrid, rude pig of a girl!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," said Ben, "she did not say 'Miss.'"

"It was all because of my dress," I exclaimed. "I saw her looking at it. Of course she takes me for a tramp."

"I suppose we can't expect to be treated as we ought, by people who don't know us," said Ben.

I sighed. "Ah! it is all through our running away from home!"

Instead of the girl, the landlady appeared, and, eyeing us, inquisitively, asked if we wanted dinner.

"Yes," I replied, "and we are very hungry; so, please to make haste."

"Why, bless us and save us! And who are you, I should like to know, that I'm to put myself out like that? A whipper-snapper of a girl, come here on the tramp!"

I was aghast; so was Ben. We were speechless with horror and amazement. The virago resumed.

"And how do I know you can afford to pay me for your dinner? Where's your recommendations, I'd like to know?"

So saying, she stuck her arms akimbo, and waited for a reply.

I shrunk close to my brother, murmuring, "Oh, Ben!" He looked up boldly into the inflamed, bloated face before him, and said,—

"You would not speak so to my sister, if you knew who she is—if you saw her in her own home. Don't you see that she is a lady, though she *has* torn her dress?"

For the irate landlady had been staring fixedly at the unfortunate rent.

"Well, what I say, is this;—them as is gentlefolks, ought to behave as sech, and bring a recommendation, and not go a trapesing off directly after their breakfast without paying for it, or their bed, and leave me that turned inside out in my mind, as you might have knocked me down with a straw—"

Here, the furious dame paused for breath.

"We did not think of that, Winnie, dear. We never thought anyone could mistake us for thieves," said Ben, very quietly. Then, addressing the woman, he added, summoning fine words for the occasion,—

"Our intentions were honourable. You were under a misreprehension. Our means are quite requisate to our expenses. To prevent further disconception, we will, at once, pay you for all that we have occurred, and for our dinner in ancitipation."

This was said with extreme apparent dignity; but I knew, by the tremor in the poor little boy's voice, and by his blunders—so much worse than usual, that he was dreadfully nervous and excited. However, he at once drew forth his purse, and poured out its contents upon the table. I did the same. At sight of the heap of gold and silver, the dame relented, and broke into profuse apologies, laying the blame of her mistake on her 'ealth, and the wickedness of "some parties who ran away from her inn without paying the bill."

"Ah, yes, my good young lady and gentleman, and if looks could bespeak the lady and gentleman, I shouldn't have mistrusted you; but you wouldn't believe the artfulness of some parties that comes here, dressed out in silks and satins, and looking like the highest in the land, and then bolts. It's that tryin' to my 'ealth, that I often wish I was in 'eaven—I do!"

A copious flood of tears closed this speech.

"We should like to pay you, and to have some dinner," I said, shrinking with repugnance from the fury.

"No, not if you was to go down on your bended knees, would I take a penny of your money till you ask me for the bill in the usual way, my good lady and gentleman. And now, what would you please to order, Ma'am and Sir?"

"Not a leg of mutton!" I replied.

"Nor a sirloin of beef," said Ben.

"Could we have a little fish, and two cutlets, and a pudding?" I suggested.

"I don't think we could get any fish, my good young lady; but you can have the chops and the pudding."

"Then, as soon as possible," added Ben.

"What a horrible woman," I ejaculated, when she had left the room. "Is she out of her mind, do you think, Ben?"

"I'm afraid she is," he replied.

"Oh, how *very* dreadful, Ben, dear! To think we should have come to this!—And all through running away from home!" I remorsefully added.

"Ah! what silly children we were?" sighed Ben. "We thought we should be treated just the same as if we were at home. We didn't see, that we were treated with respect, for the sake of the dear Governor. No one would have dared to insult us, because they were afraid of offending him."

"Ah, yes, that was it!" I sighed, in my turn. "We imagined *we* were thought much of! What stuck-up apes we were!"

This dawning of experience was very bitter, but it was wholesome, though I did not think so, then.

"We will get away from here, this evening," said Ben. "It is two o'clock now. We will walk, till we come to somewhere."

"It is too hot for much walking to-day," I replied; "we can start in the cool of the evening."

It *was* hot!—the hottest day we had felt that summer; a dry, burning pressing-down heat, that made ones eyes ache, and seemed to unfit one for any exertion.

"If only it would rain! What a long time it is, since it has rained," I said; "not since we left home, nor for weeks before that."

"But it would not be so nice, travelling, if it rained?" Ben demurred.

"Oh! it might rain in the night, and be fine in the day," I answered,

"Yes, that would do," assented Ben.

As we were thus quietly arranging the dispensations of Providence to our own satisfaction, the servant girl came in, bearing the table-cloth under her arm, and a tray in her hands; and she proceeded to lay the cloth.

"Oh, if you please, we should like a clean table-cloth," I implored, eyeing, with insurmountable repugnance, the stained and crumpled article in question.

"I'll ask the Missis," was the reply, as she left the room.

The next moment the 'Missis' appeared, her face rather redder, and her manner rather coarser than before.

"The idle hussy!" she exclaimed, glaring savagely at the poor 'help.' "To think of serving the Quality in such a fashion!" And, snatching the offending cloth off the table,

she proceeded to spread another, yellow in hue, but free from stains.

"She don't know better. She's never been used to the Quality," was the 'Missis's' apology, as she left the room. I made up my mind not to complain again, whatever happened; but sat in silence, watching, with unspeakable disgust, the dirty knives and forks, the dull, smeared glass, and roughly washed, nubbly plates. Then I glanced furtively at the poor drudge; for I had heard a deep sigh escape her.

A large tear trickled down her cheek, and I saw that her face was quivering, and her throat swelling. Ben saw it too. In a moment, he sprang forward, and laid his hand on her arm.

"Don't cry," he said, "poor thing! Don't mind anything that horrid woman says. *We* don't think you idle and dirty! Do we, Winnie?"

"No," I said, "we think you quite nice, now! Don't fret? She is not worth it."

Then the poor thing, unused to sympathy, flung her coarse, stained apron over her face, and sobbed uncontrollably.

"Oh! hush! hush!" I entreated. "If she hears you, she will come in, and perhaps she will beat you—who knows?"

"I won't let her!" exclaimed Ben.

"She 'ave! she 'ave! many a time. She beats me, and starves me, and gives me bad words—nothing else—nothing else, now!"

I glanced at Ben; the same thought struck us both. Here was this poor slave, living on, under her heavy burden, while we, thankless wretches, had run away from our darling home for a mere whim! I felt covered with shame.

"Why don't you run away? Why do you bear it?" I asked.

"Oh! its for Grace. I wouldn't, only for Grace!" she sobbed.

"Who is Grace?" asked Ben.

"The Missis's daughter."

"Are you fond of her?"

"Fond of her! Fond of her!" was all the answer, in a sort of wonderment.

"You are not?" I pursued.

"Why—Grace is—is—, why, Grace is a *h*angel!" cried the poor drudge.

"You love her, then?"

"Love her?—I love the very shoes she wears—the very ground she treads on!"

"Where is Grace? Why haven't we seen her?" asked Ben.

Then the poor creature burst out afresh into a bitter flood of tears.

"No one never sees her! She's lying in her bed, and 'ave been for weeks now.

"Is she dying?" I asked.

"No!—and don't you dare for to say it! Dying? No, it's only this 'ot weather tries her, and before that, it was the winter didn't agree with her. When we gets cooler weather, she'll be about again."

"And do you nurse her?"

"Yes, I sleeps on the floor in her room now, praise be to God!"

"Does she sleep well?"

"No, her cough keeps her from sleeping. It's only her cough. If it wasn't for that, she'd be quite strong."

"Then, I suppose, you can't sleep much, either?"

"Oh, that don't matter. I can do my work all the same."

"Before Grace was ill, she helped you to do your work, I suppose?"

"Yes; and them *was* times! Before the Missis was *always* tight, she weren't that bad in temper, but what one could please her sometimes; and if she gave me a bad word, Grace gave me a good one, and set it all right."

"Is her mother fond of her?"

"By whiles; but she's always tight."

I did not quite understand this expression, but thought it was the synonym for "close fisted." Ben, who had been amongst boys, knew better.

"You idle, good-for-nothing hussy, how long do you mean to keep the Quality a 'waitin'' for their dinners?" screamed the virago, suddenly dashing open the door. "Come along with you!"

Poor Nellie (for that was her name) bolted from the room in all speed, but, just outside the door, we heard the sound of a blow, and a half suppressed cry.

Ben started to his feet, his little face all ablaze. He was about to dash out of the room; but I restrained him, saying,

"Don't, dear; you will only make the brute punish her worse, afterwards."

When Nellie came back with the dinner, she had the same sad, worn-out look as before. The blow had made no difference; evidently she was used to blows.

"What is your Mistress's name?" I asked.

"Stokes."

"Is there any Mr. Stokes?"

"Oh yes, poor man! He can't abide her ways, and has gone off, on a spell of work."

"Does Grace love her father?"

"Don't she? And he dotes upon her."

"Why doesn't he take her away to live with him?"

"She wouldn't leave her mother. She thought, if she went, her Mother would go to the bad, worse than if she stopped."

"And so, you stay for Grace's sake?"

"What else should I stop for?"

"If Grace went away with her father, would you go, too?"

"Yes; that would be a blessed time!"

"But since Grace *won't* go, why should you stay here to be killed with cruelty."

"I'm happy, minding Grace."

"If you will go, I will get you into a place, where you will be always kindly treated, and well fed. And, perhaps, if you went, Grace would go too. She could not stop without you, I am sure."

"I wouldn't go first. I'd go with Grace."

"Do think it over, Nellie."

"I can't never think it different. I couldn't be happy for a *h*our away from Grace."

The poor faithful soul! What could be done for her?

"Your dinner will be spiled, if you don't eat it," suggested poor practical Nellie.

Very well," I said. And Nellie left us.

"Spiled," indeed! That process had been effected before it left the kitchen. The cutlets were masses of alternate gore and grease, tastefully garnished with coals. We gazed at each other in mute dismay.

"What *shall* we do?" asked Ben.

"If we complain, she will beat Nellie."

"Oh! we mustn't complain," I said.

"But she will see we have not eaten them," argued Ben.

"Yes; besides, I'm dreadfully hungry," I answered.

"Let's try the vegetables," suggested Ben, lifting the cover from the dish of potatoes.

Alas! no hope there! A pulpy, starchy, watery mash, nicely frosted over with coal dust!

"What's this?" continued the indefatigable Ben, lifting the other cover: "Cabbage."

Heavens! Never had I dreamed of being offered such a dish of entomological specimens, as now met my gaze! Regardless of consequences, I rang the inevitable hand-bell; and, thanks be to Allah, Nellie appeared, and not her mistress.

"Oh, Nellie! Nellie!" I cried, "we *can't* eat this dinner! What can we do? Look at these raw coaly, greasy chops! Look at these potatoes! And oh! this horrid, horrid cabbage, full of creatures!"

"Yes, it do make one's stomach 'eave and turn," replied Nellie. "Of course, you can't eat it."

"But how can we get rid of it, without her finding it out?" asked Ben.

"Oh! that don't matter. I'll pitch it away into the pit, and she'll never know. But what ever *will* you do? Can you eat eggs and bacon?"

"Yes, if they are clean," I said.

"Then stop till she gets tighter, and goes to bed, and I'll cook you some. I'll warrant they'll be clean."

"You, poor Nellie!" said Ben. "How good of you, with all you have to do!"

"Oh, that don't matter, so long as you're pleased," said Nellie, carrying off the offending viands. There was a little pause; then she came back, bearing a covered dish, which sent forth a fragrance, unspeakably tempting. With an air of triumph, she lifted the cover, and there were several shell-pink, creamy, poached eggs, resting lightly on slices of bacon done to a turn!

"I cooked em myself. She were that tight, she were dropped off asleep, and snoring."

"Delicious!" we said; and, as Nellie immediately vanished, we fell to, with a will, and quickly demolished the whole.

Another pause, and then Nellie appeared, with a dish of pancakes, also cooked irreproachably. We clapped our hands, and said "Bravo! Nellie!—"

"Now, I must go to Grace," she said. "When you want me, please to ring."

After dinner, not wishing to disturb poor Nellie just yet, we went to the window, and sat down there.

"How the sky has changed!" I said. "We must be going to have a storm."

"We shall not be able to go on to-night," rejoined Ben.

The heat was intense, unbearable, and the sky had turned to a dull coppery hue, and seemed pressing down upon us. There was no sound in the air. Air? there seemed none. We were in a sort of glowing, airless, soundless, furnace. It grew hotter and hotter. I took one of the straw mats from the table, and fanned myself. Ben did the same.

"Oh! if it would rain!" I said.

"How quiet everything is," said Ben. "It is only four o'clock, yet the birds seem to have gone to sleep. There isn't a sound anywhere."

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, there was a splitting, crashing roar, and a flash that lit up the whole sky, at the same time; and the storm was upon us. I slammed down the window, and flying across the room, hid my face in the sofa pillow. Ben was beside me instantly, and threw his arms round me.

"Oh! it's awful! it's awful!" I whispered.

"Don't be frightened, darling. God will not let us be hurt," he replied, in hushed tones.

"*You* may feel so; I can't!" I shudderingly replied. "He is angry with us! We have sinned! We deserve to be punished. *I* do, at least; for you wanted to turn back. It was *my* doing—all my doing! I——"

A splitting crash of thunder, just over-head, drowned my voice, and then down came the rain in torrents. I shivered down into the sofa, and stopped my ears. Ben gently shook me to attract my attention.

I ventured to look up: he was speaking, and in a tone of authority. "Something has happened. I heard a scream—I'm sure I did; and a bumping, tumbling sound."

We listened. There was another scream, and another. Ben rushed to the door, and I, dreading to be alone, followed him. We were guided by the sound, to a room over-head, whence scream after scream continued to issue. Ben burst into the room, where a dreadful sight met us. On the floor, lay a confused mass of bricks and mortar; and in the midst, partly buried under it, was a human form, still living, but evidently in great agony. Ben only said, "Quick! Winnie, quick!" and began hastily to remove the bricks from the wretched

creature beneath. I helped him. At first, we did not recognize the sufferer, for the face was concealed by its long dishevelled black hair; but in a few minutes the features were visible, and we saw that they were those of our wretched hostess. Lying in the middle of the room, was an empty brandy bottle, the contents of which had flowed across the floor; that, and a broken tumbler, told its own tale.

"A bolt must have struck the chimney; and she was too drunk to save herself," said Ben.

We had now removed the weight from the woman's body, but she did not stir; only, as she breathed heavily, we knew she was not dead.

"What shall we do?" I asked.

"We must try to get help," said Ben.

"You stay here, while I go for some one."

"Oh, no! I couldn't!" I shudderingly answered. Worse than the deafening thunder, and blinding flashes, which still went on, was the repulsive, horrifying object before me.

"We will both go," said Ben. "You could do her no good by staying."

We left her, and followed a long, low passage to its end, where was a turn, and then another, and we stopped before the door of a room, where we heard a voice—praying, it seemed. This room was quite away from all the others, and so cut off by the turnings of the passage, that the screams of the landlady had probably been unheard from there.

We recognized the voice, as Nellie's.

"Good Lord help! Send her sleep! Oh! stop this storm, and let her sleep! She is so tired!"

And then, a voice, very sweet and faint, said,—

"I shall sleep soon, Nellie, dear, and be out of pain. We must be patient a little longer—only a little longer."

"And then we'll go out again in the pleasant cool evening, my precious, my lamb! and you'll forget all your bad nights, and days full of pain!"

"I shall never go out with you, again, Nellie. I am dying now. I have a feeling *here*, that I have never had before."

"No—no—" we heard, in accents of horror; "you don't know—you don't understand—I must get a poultice—"

"No, Nellie, you have done all you could for me; and nothing would be of any use now. I am dying, and it is God's will. You *must* submit."

"I won't! I won't! not while there's a chance! A poultice must do you good!"

"No, Nellie, I *know* that this is death. Oh, don't make it harder for me to part from you! We shall be together again, where we shall have such happy times, dear, and no pain or trouble. Only, a little patience!"

A dead silence followed. Poor Nellie was evidently stunned with horror. But at last, she faltered,

"It must be true, because you couldn't tell a lie, no more than one of God's angels! It must be true!"

"Oh, Nellie, it is better, so. Try to believe it."

"But your cough is gone! You haven't coughed for hours. You *must* be better!"

"No, Nellie. No, my poor Nellie."

"Ought we to go in?" asked Ben.

"I think so," I replied, as I tapped at the door.

"Come in," said Nellie, in an altered voice.

We entered tremblingly. It was a small room, scrupulously neat and clean, hung with snowy draperies. On a little bed, covered with a spotlessly white quilt, a fair-haired girl was propped up with pillows. One wasted arm lay upon the quilt; the other rested upon Nellie's shoulder. The face was lighted up with an almost seraphic expression; but the blue pinched shadows about the mouth and nose, told their own tale. I had never seen death; but none who looked upon that face, could doubt that he was very near. Only poor Nellie's despairing love blinded her to the truth.

The dying girl looked at us placidly, without any apparent curiosity. I beckoned Nellie forward, and, in a whisper, told her what had happened. She listened in a sort of stupor, and then said, "I'll go. You bide with my dear, and don't leave her for one minute. If she wants me, send the young Master."

I quietly sat down beside Grace, who closed her eyes, as though to sleep. Ben stood at the door. In about ten minutes, Nellie returned.

"It's no use," she said, "Missis gives no sign. I can't move her, nor wake her. I must try to get the doctor. But how can I leave my precious?"

"She is going to sleep, I think," I whispered. "I will stay with her; but don't be long. Does the doctor live here?"

"No; but there's a farm-house about half-a-mile off; and they'll put a horse into the car, and fetch the doctor."

"Are you not afraid of the lightning?"

"Afraid? with *her* to think of!" she bitterly replied, glancing at Grace.

Then she came to the bedside, stooped over the sleeping girl, gently pressed her lips to the fair hair, and turned to go.

"I'll go with you," said Ben.

"No need," argued Nellie.

"But I *will*," Ben stoutly rejoined. For one instant, I demurred. I dreaded being left alone with Grace. If she should die! I had never seen death. But, the next moment, I felt ashamed of my cowardly selfishness; and, as Ben glanced towards me for approval, I replied,

"Yes, go."

The next moment, I was alone with the dying, whose faint breathing I could not hear, for the loud beating of my own heart. The thunder was abating; only a distant rumbling could now and then be heard. I strained my hearing, to catch any sound from the room where the wretched landlady lay, but could hear nothing. A great horror fell upon me. Grace did not wake, or stir, in the least. I sat there with beating heart, and tightly clasped hands, waiting, waiting.

At last I thought I heard a sound of wheels in the distance. It approached, nearer and nearer, and stopped. Thank God! I whispered in my heart. Steps upon the stairs; then Nellie and the doctor entered.

"See her first," whispered Nellie to him. "She thinks she's dying; but it can't be."

The doctor approached the bed with a candle, felt the girl's pulse, lifted her eyelid.

"Oh, don't, Sir! You'll wake her!" implored Nellie.

"Now, for the patient," he said. I noticed he did not say 'the *other* patient.'

"But Grace?—you haven't said, Sir—" put in Nellie, "how is Grace?"

"I will tell you presently, my good girl. Come, now, to your mistress."

We remained with Grace, while the doctor and Nellie were away. Grace never stirred. All was still as the grave. We anxiously awaited their return. They were absent full half an hour, then they both came back; the doctor, looking grave, Nellie, with a white, frightened look in her face. But

the one thought was uppermost,—Grace. She crept to the bed-side, and bent over the quiet form laid there.

"Hasn't she woke at all?" she asked.

"No," I replied, "she has never stirred."

"Not all the time while we went to fetch the doctor?"

"No, she has slept ever since."

"Then she will wake stronger," said Nellie, with a smile of satisfaction. "I'll hot her beef-tea for her, against she wakes."

As she was turning away, the doctor laid his hand upon her arm.

"There is no need, my poor Nellie."

Something in the tone of his voice made Nellie glance quickly into his face. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Nellie," he answered, "you love Grace?"

"Love her? Love her?" she exclaimed, in sort of dazed, bewildered way.

"I know you do. You would give up anything in the world to make her happy—to do her good?"

"Oh, wouldn't I! wouldn't I!—I would go to the bad place, and burn for ever, if it was God's will that I should do her good that way,"

"Poor Nellie! Well, as long as she stays in this world, she will suffer. The longer she stays, the worse it will be. Do you want to keep her, just for your pleasure."

"But—but, Sir, she is better; she hasn't coughed for hours. She will get well again, and lose her pain, and we shall have happy times, now that poor Missis is—Oh! poor Missis; poor Missis!" sobbed the good soul.

"No, Nellie, she will never get well—never! Do you want to keep her here, to suffer?"

We two knew what he meant. Our hearts ached for poor Nellie. She was silent for a minute; then, in low, broken accents, she replied,—

"No, I wouldn't."

"She has ceased to suffer, Nellie!"

"Not dead? Not dead?" gasped the girl.

"No, but she is quietly sinking off. She has been insensible for some time."

"Oh! won't she never know me again? Won't she never say 'poor Nellie' no more? Never no more?"

"Yes, when you meet again—not till then, Nellie."

A mute, helpless, strong misery, fell upon the girl's face. She knelt down beside her dying treasure, to listen to the faint breathing—to catch the last remnant of life from the lips. The doctor turned to me.

"Are you a relation?"

"No; my brother and I came here yesterday, only, just for a rest, on our way to another place. We ought to have left this evening, but the storm prevented us."

"You cannot go for a day or two," he added. "The landlady is dead, and there will be an inquest to-morrow. I believe you and your brother were the first to discover the catastrophe?"

"Yes," I replied; "but we would rather not have to give our evidence."

"You must, and it can't be helped," he said, very briefly. "I must go now. Take care of that poor servant girl. She will need comforting."

"What will become of her?" I asked.

"My wife has always wished to take her into our service; but she would not leave Grace. We'll take her now. Good night."

When he was gone, we sat down to await what was coming. We had not long to wait. We knew by the look on Nellie's face, the precise moment when the last faint breath flickered out. Then all was still. For the first time in our lives, we were in the presence of Death.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALL that happened the following day, seemed then, and has seemed since, like a dreadful dream. The inquest, the evidence; the agony of the wretched husband and father, who had been at once sent for; the impassable look on poor Nellie's face; the mute, rigid form, stretched on the table of the inn parlour; the thought of the other still form, in the little white-draped room above. It would all have been so horrible, had it not been so bewildering.

But at last it was over, and everyone left. I looked for Nellie, to come out and shut the door; but she did not stir.

"Come, Nellie," I said.

She gazed forward stupidly, but did not move.

"What is the matter with her, Ben?" I whispered. "I'm frightened."

Ben took both her hands, and tried to lead her away; but she still remained motionless.

"Poor Nellie!" said Ben, trying to draw her on.

"Poor Nellie!" echoed the girl.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "Oh Ben, I'm so frightened!"

"So am I," said Ben. "We ought to have some one with us. What *shall* we do?"

"Where is the landlord?" I mused.

"Upstairs, perhaps," suggested Ben.

"He so loved his daughter, poor man! Let us take Nellie there," said I.

"Yes, that will be best. Come, Nellie!" And again Ben tried to lead her away. But she did not move.

"Come to Grace," urged Ben.

"Grace," said Nellie, still echoing the last word. But the sound seemed to awake some memory.

"Come to Grace," repeated Ben.

"Come to Grace," echoed Nellie. As we both tried to draw her forward, she yielded; and as he kept repeating the word, "Grace," she passively allowed us to lead her upstairs.

The poor landlord was sobbing his heart away, over the little head on the pillow. I had to touch his arm. He looked up.

"Something is the matter with Nellie," I whispered. "We can't make her understand."

He lifted his heavy eyelids, and looked at Nellie.

"Oh! the poor lass! She's gone clean dazed!" he exclaimed.

—"Out of her mind?" I asked, tremblingly.

"Yes, sure. Why Nellie! Nellie, lass! Don't you know me?"

"Know me?" she repeated.

"Here's Grace—your dear Grace. Don't you know Grace?"

"Know Grace? Know Grace?" was the answer.

"I must go for the doctor. You won't be afraid to stop here, young lady?" he asked.

"No," I answered, ashamed to give way to the cowardly sinking of my heart, in the face of such misery as this.

He left; and we made poor Nellie resume her seat beside the bed.

"If only she would cry!" said Ben.

But neither tear nor sigh escaped her. She sat there, perfectly still and unconcerned, staring, vacantly, forward. And so that wretched time passed away, till the landlord returned with the doctor and a nurse. Then, utterly worn out with excitement, terror, and want of sleep, I went to my room, and lay down on the bed. Ben too, went off to rest.

It was three o'clock then, and I slept till six. Starting up with a vague sense of trouble and bewilderment, I found Ben sitting beside me.

"Lie down again, darling," he said.

I was very nearly asleep again, when the nurse entered the room.

"Where's Nellie?" she asked.

"We have not seen her," I answered.

"The doctor fetched me to lay out poor Grace," she continued. "I didn't notice what became of Nellie. I thought she was still with you."

"We have not seen her," said Ben.

"Humph!" mused the nurse. "It's a pity I didn't miss her sooner."

"Where do you think she can be?" we asked.

"There's no telling. She may have gone to the doctor's. She has had to go there often lately, and the doctor's lady is very good to her. I'll ask Mr. Stokes to go and see if she is

there. It will do him good to have to go, poor man! But we may as well look about for her while we are waiting."

We searched the house, then the garden, and then went into the field beyond; but Nellie was not to be found.

"I am glad she has gone to the doctor's," said Ben. "He looked a kind man."

The nurse said nothing, but seemed anxious. We all waited quietly for the return of the landlord, who came back accompanied by the doctor.

"Has the girl been found?" He spoke quickly and sharply, addressing the nurse.

"No sir," she timidly replied. "Nellie is nowhere about the place."

"Good heavens! Is it possible you have lost sight of her? Didn't I tell you to see to her?"

"Yes sir; but I couldn't be everywhere at once. I was busy, laying out poor Grace, and—"

"There! There! What's the use of talking, when we ought to be doing? She *must* be somewhere about the place."

But after searching everywhere, he came back, and said, "It's a bad job, I'm afraid," and, getting into his gig, drove off quickly, looking exceedingly troubled.

Ben and I sat in my room, holding each other by the hand, trembling at every sound, expecting that any moment might produce some fresh catastrophe; but we never dreamt of what had really happened. And so the evening wore away, till it was past eight o'clock, and quite dusk.

Then we heard the sound of approaching wheels. Ben looked from the window.

"A chaise, and four men in it," he exclaimed. "Why, one is the doctor! And what *have* they got with them"?

We went a few steps down the stairs, and heard the doctor ask, "Has the girl come back?" Receiving an answer in the negative, he gave the chaise into the charge of the landlord, who took it to the stable, and then went out with the rest, bearing the odd-looking thing they had brought with them.

We could not imagine what they were about, and had only to wait for further news. We had got the landlord to tell us what we should owe him by the next morning, and while we waited, we counted out the sum; for we had a dread of staying there, and longed to be away. Having

placed the money where he would be sure to find it, we again waited impatiently.

"She must have wandered away somewhere, to be quiet and alone," said Ben. "She will be soaked to the very skin, if she is sitting on the wet grass."

"We won't leave, without knowing what has become of her, and seeing her off to the doctor's," I replied.

"Here comes one of the men," said Ben.

The nurse, who had been on the watch, ran down to meet the man.

"A lantern," he called out. "And have you a shutter?"

"Is she found?" asked Ben.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the pond."

Poor Nellie's troubles were over—the faithful heart, at rest. She and Grace had their "happy times" once more.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WITHOUT undressing, I had flung myself down on my bed, and must have slept almost instantly; nor did I wake, till the crowing of a cock under my window made me start up in sudden terror, which was followed by a quick remembrance of all the dreadful things that had happened in rapid succession, during the last two days.

I felt a great horror of this place, an unspeakable longing to get away from it at once. The dawn was breaking. Creeping noiselessly from my room, I stole into Ben's.

He had thrown himself, dressed, upon his bed, and slept soundly. One arm supported his head. His golden hair had fallen back. His lips were parted. There was a sad look on the dear little face, that had not been there before he left his home. My conscience stung me bitterly, and I forbore to wake the poor tired, troubled little fellow. "I will be patient," I thought. "I will not wake him for a whole hour."

So I sat at his window, and watched the dawn breaking over the garden, and over the large trees at the bottom. Before long, the faint chirping of the half-awake birds, swelled into a universal twitter; then there was a great fuss and stirring among the branches, and one or two little feathered things flew down to the ground to look for food. They were soon followed by others. Some flew straight away; others ran about, and fluttered, and quarrelled, and screamed at each other. Blackbirds, thrushes, sparrows, linnets, finches, all rushing about in such a desperate hurry. And how the large birds—the blackbirds, especially, chased the little ones, running along after them with heads down, and beaks wide open. Then one blackbird, espying an unhappy "early worm," which foolishly ventured its head and shoulders out of the earth, seized it, stood upon it with one foot, and gave a long cry,—"Ch-ch—ch-ch—ch-ch!" to call his mate to the banquet. The sound woke Ben. He raised himself on his elbow.

"Is anything the matter, Winnie, dear?" he asked, in quick alarm.

"No darling," I softly replied; "try to sleep again."

"Why are you not asleep?" he asked.

"I woke up, and thought I'd come in here."

"Frightened? Poor Winnie! Why didn't you wake me?"

"I wasn't frightened, dear."

Ben got off the bed, and, coming to the window, looked out. The morning was breaking in all its glory.

"How splendid!" he said. "We shall get away from here to-day, shall we, Winnie?"

"Yes, darling; the sooner the better," I replied.

"Why not now?" he asked.

"This very minute, if you like, dear," I answered.

"Then we will pack our bundles and be off," he gladly replied.

In half an hour we were footing it along in the bright cheery morning. The thunder storm had cleared the air, and it was delightfully refreshing. Ben stepped out gaily, drinking in all the pleasant sights and sounds. I walked on sadly and thoughtfully, and replied absently to all Ben's gay words. At last he said,—

"What's the matter, Winnie, dear? Aren't you well."

"Yes Ben, but I feel very miserable."

"Oh no! No! Winnie!—Why?"

"Everything is so dark—so sad. There is so much trouble in the world!"

"You will forget all this, dear, in a day or two. It will be just like a dream, you know."

"It isn't that, only, Ben."

"What then, dear?"

"I blame myself so very much!"

"Why, my darling Winnie?"

Oh! the dear, yearning look, in the bright, wistful face!

"Seeing how well and bravely poor Nellie bore hard treatment, I am ashamed of myself for having run away from such a home, and such a father, as ours!"

"But that ogre of a woman!" interposed Ben, anxious to excuse me.

"How do we know she was an ogre?" I asked. "Besides, we had *such* a father—so many comforts and blessings—I never valued them one bit till now."

"Nor I either," said Ben, hanging his head.

"I was a nasty, selfish tyrant!" I exclaimed.

"So was I," said Ben.

"Think what we have done," I continued. "The very

first time we were ever crossed in our lives, we forgot all the love and kindness that had been poured upon us since we were born. To please ourselves, we forsook every soul that loved us; we left them to trouble and fret about us—I know they have! Poor old Nurse! Think of her!"

Big tears gathered in Ben's eyes. I resumed.

"And what a coming home, for our dear father!—our dear father! I was thinking of all this, yesterday, and part of the day before; and while you were asleep and I was looking out of the window, it came upon me more strongly than ever. Oh! I see it all so differently from what I did!"

Ben threw his arms around me caressingly, in a mute attempt at consolation. I continued, "I should never have seen it this way, at the 'Crown and Anchor.' Everything went so smoothly. I was so happy."

"Is that what David meant, when he said, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statues?'" Ben timidly asked.

"*Statutes*, dear; I suppose so," I sadly replied. "And oh! Ben, it seems to me, I have acted so wickedly, that I shall certainly be punished in some dreadful way."

"I am just as bad," pleaded Ben.

"No, darling; you wanted not to leave home. It was all my doing! I twitted you with being 'like a girl!' Don't you remember?"

"Yes, Winnie dear. Oh! how I should like to fight for you, just to show you that I am not 'like a girl!'"

"And another thing," I pursued; "I see that the proper place for children of our age, is in their father's home. When once they leave that, they are nobody! They may be insulted at any moment—as we have been, and meet with all sorts of terrible adventures, as we have done."

"Let us go back at once! Oh! *do* let us go home to-day!" he cried.

I hesitated. Oh! where was my good angel at that moment! A remnant of yet unquelled, stubborn pride, made me say, "We will wait for the answer to our advertisement; then we shall know what to do. If the answer is to bid us return, we will go back directly."

"—And if it is not?" asked Ben.

"Then, I should not dare go back! Oh Ben! to think what I have brought upon myself and you!"

"Winnie! Winnie!" he again implored, "*Let* us go back at once! Dear Father might be a little angry at first; but we would kiss him, and kiss him, and beg him to forgive us, and tell him how unhappy we have been, and he would never hold out for long. Oh Winnie, we *ought* to go home *now—now!*"

He spoke in impassioned tones. His face glowed with the fervour of his entreaty. Why—why did I not yield? Oh, blind! blind!

"Don't say any more, Ben—please don't!" I replied. "I have not courage to go back. We will wait till Wednesday."

Ben sighed, and said no more. We walked on, and on, at random, hardly noticing which way we went. At last, feeling tired, and very hungry, we sat down by the way-side, and began to consider what we had better do.

"If we could get to the railway," said Ben.

"Yes," I said, "I should like to get away as far as possible from that dreadful place."

"But we haven't the least idea where we are now," said Ben.

"Is that a sound of wheels?" I interrupted.

Ben bent his ear to listen. I climbed on to the gate we had just got over, and, from the top, saw a waggon drawn by a pair of horses, coming along the road. We waited till it came up. Then Ben accosted the driver. "If you please, can you tell us the way to the Railway?"

"What railway?" asked the man.

"Any," answered Ben.

"I'm going there now, and I'll give you a lift. Jump in."

Ben looked towards me. It was dreadfully *infra dig;* but so brilliant a chance of getting to the railway, was not to be refused; so, pocketing my pride, I allowed the waggoner to help me in. Ben followed, and we were soon seated on a truss of clean straw, and jolting roughly along the high road. Ben entered into conversation with the waggoner.

"How far off is the station?"

"A matter of five mile."

"Does the train go to the sea-side.

"What sea-side?"

"Oh! any. It doesn't matter, so long as we get to some sea-side."

The waggoner eyed us both curiously. "Why you be both young, to be going about only your two selves. Who be 'ee?"

There was an awkward silence. Then I replied, "We are on a little holiday, and we want to stay at the sea-side for a little while, before we return home."

"Oh, that's it," he said.

"Will you tell us, then, whether the train goes to the sea-side, and how far off it will be?"

"The train as I'm a'going to meet don't come from the sea. That's all I know," was the stupid answer.

Then we came to a cross-road, and met another cart, the driver of which was a friend of his. So they jolted along, side by side, and he said no more to us.

When we arrived at the railway, we found everything very quiet, the station being a small one, and the hour so early. The ticket office was not yet open, nor would it be for three quarters of an hour; so we found our way to a little shop, and there had a draught of milk, and a hunch of bread each, which refreshed us. Then we returned to the station.

"We want to go to the sea-side, if you please," said Ben, to the man in the ticket office.

"What name?" he asked, regarding, with an amused expression, the couple of little tramps before him.

"We forget the name," I answered, vainly racking my bewildered brains for the sea-side place we had originally started for; "but it is a little, quiet place."

"Cellings, maybe?" he suggested.

"Yes, very likely," I replied.

"Does it go *straight* there?" asked Ben, with admirable forethought.

"Yes; only a little branch line for the last half hour."

"Must we change there?" asked Ben.

"Yes; at Prestford. First class? Here's your tickets. Train's coming."

Who-o-o-o-o! Sh-h-h-h-h-h-h! Kr-k-k-k-k! Shriek—grate—ring—grate again, and the restive, noisy thing stopped, only for a minute, as no one got out, and we were the only passengers from that station.

"No kind Mrs. Thatcher to run after us, this time, Ben," I sighed.

"No; what a dear, kind brick she was," he responded.

"We didn't deserve to be so happy as we were at the 'Crown and Anchor,'" I humbly observed.

"We have had trouble enough since," said Ben.

"Serve us right!" I exclaimed.

It was a wearisome journey, for we were tired, and longed to be at our destination, in some quiet little inn where we could "have a good wash," and something to eat, as we were faint for want of food. The train seemed a very slow one, and the stoppages interminable; but at last, in answer to our constant inquiries, we were told that Prestford was only three stations off. Those three stations seemed to be very far apart; but at last, they too became things of the past; and when next the train stopped, our ears were regaled with the delightful sound, "Prestford! Prestford!"

We scrambled out, fearing to be taken on if we didn't, and then waited till the Cellings train came up, on a single line of rail—from Cellings, evidently. The train consisted of only one carriage.

"That looks well," said Ben; "it is a little out-of-the-way place, just what we want."

In great excitement we rushed headlong into the carriage, and exchanged glances of intense satisfaction. We went along quietly and slowly, between thickly wooded hills, till, in about half an hour we came to a tiny station, the smallest we had ever seen, flanked on either side by a little garden in a perfect blaze of flowers.

"Cellings," said the station-master, opening the door of our carriage. We got out. The station-master took our tickets.

"We should like to have a carriage to take us to the inn," said Ben.

"I'm afraid you've come to the wrong place, my boy," replied the man, looking kindly at Ben; "there is no inn here."

"No inn!" he echoed, in dismay.

"No, it wouldn't pay."

"Then why is there a train to bring people here?" I asked, in an injured tone.

"There are lots of houses all about the country, and the gentry go to-an-fro, and they have their carriages. Then there's the country people, and they mostly come in their carts or their two-wheel shays. But it's the *traffic* that pays; there's a good deal of traffic."

We didn't care one bit for the traffic, nor whether the line paid. We only heeded the appalling fact, that there was

no inn in this dreadful Cellings. We gazed ruefully at each other. Were our troubles *never* to have an end?

"What *can* we do?" I exclaimed.

"Have you got any friends about here?" asked the station-master.

"No; all our friends are far away from here," I replied.

"We are perfectly helpless," added Ben.

"We have had only a little milk and bread to-day, and that was a long time ago."

"Why, what a shame, to send two children about in this way! What sort of people are yours, I wonder?" asked the station-master.

"Oh! don't blame them! It is not their fault!" pleaded Ben.

"Well, I'm going home now, and you'd better come with me," he said, after thinking for a minute or two. "I'll ask my good lady what's to be done."

We trotted tamely after our friend, who walked ahead of us without the least ceremony, till we came to a small house, with a little garden in front, and a small shop window wherein were displayed bread, butter, a few cakes, sweeties, eggs, and groceries, together with small draperies, such as tapes, cotton, hooks-and-eyes, and the like. Over this window the name "WARNER" shone conspicuous, in letters of blue and gold.

Mrs. Warner was behind the counter. She was a woman of middle height and middle age, with black eyes, black glassy ringlets, and an ever-ready, mincing smile; the sort of woman whom her equals would designate "very genteel," and "quite the lady." Mr. Warner was evidently much impressed with the idea of his wife's gentility; in fact, he deferred to her in everything, and looked upon her as a very superior being indeed.

"These two young——" Mr. Warner hesitated for a word, and then went on—"these two young First Classes have come here by mistake, Mrs. Warner, my dear, and want your advice."

"Certainly Mr. Warner, certainly," replied his "genteel" spouse. "What did you wish to know, mem?" addressing me.

"I don't know what—what we wish to know," I stammered; for my mind was a perfect "chowse" (as Ben always

would pronounce it, meaning "chaos.") I was so dreadfully taken aback at not finding the charming little inn I had been picturing to myself all the way to this aggravating Cellings.

"We thought, ma'am," pursued Ben, with his most polite manner, "we thought Cellings was a place where there was an inn. We have been dreadfully mistaken, and don't know what to do."

"Will nothing but an inn suit?" asked Mrs. Warner.

"What else could we do?" I asked.

"We have money, and could pay; and it *is* so dreadful not to find an inn!"

"A comfortable lodging might perhaps suit you as well as an inn, mem?" suggested Mrs. Warner.

"Of course it would!" cried Ben. "How stupid, not to think of that!"

"But we have no servants with us, to cook and do the work," I remonstrated. "We shouldn't know how to set about it, I'm afraid."

"Cooking and attendance are included in the cost of furnished apartments, mem," replied Mrs. Warner.

"Oh! *do* you know of any lodgings?" I implored, with clasped hands. "We should be *so* much obliged to you, if you would tell us of any! We wouldn't give much trouble, would we, Ben?"

"Our house is larger than we have any occasion for, mem," replied Mrs. Warner; "and if you think my apartments would suit you, I should be happy to oblige you. I have always given satisfaction, mem."

"Oh how nice!" I exclaimed; "we will have them at once!"

We were shown up a very steep and narrow staircase, into a very small and stuffy room, the window of which was shut and bolted.

"This is the drawing-room," she said, with a grand air.

"Very nice," said Ben. "Will you please order your servant to bring us some breakfast, ma'am?"

"You have not seen your bed-rooms yet," said Mrs. Warner, who thereupon opened a door at the corner of the drawing-room, and disclosed a tiny bed-room.

"The best bed-room, mem," she said, with her most "genteel" manner. I thought to myself, that if this was the best, I pitied the luckless wight who had the worst; but I only echoed Ben's approving comment, "Very nice."

"You'll have this room, Winnie," said Ben; "anything will do for me. Let us have breakfast now, please, Mrs. Warner."

"What would you please to take?" she asked.

Ben appealed to me.

"Anything," I replied; "for we are starving."

While breakfast was preparing, we had what we called "a good wash." And truly we needed it! My poor "mane!" How I missed dear old nurse! I thought I should never get it out of the horrid tangle it had got into since we had left the 'Crown and Anchor.' Good "Mother" had brushed my hair, mended our clothes, and washed for us. How should we manage now? The cares of life were beginning to press heavily upon me!

"Ben," I said, when we met in the drawing-room, "are your stockings worn out? Mine are."

"I should rather think so," replied Ben. "The soles are one mass of holes, only held together by threads. The holes are spreading out; when they meet, only the tops of my stockings will remain. Can't they be mended?"

"No dear," I replied, "they have gone too far for that; and mine are just as bad—both pair. What a pity we didn't bring away six pair each."

"And my boots are going too," pursued Ben.

"So are mine," said I. "It is very sad."

"We could buy some more, if we got to a town, with shops," suggested Ben.

"So we could," I assented; "but we want to stay here, you know. And then, about our washing? I have no clean things to put on."

"Nor I," said Ben. "It is very pigly! Hadn't we better ask Mrs. Warner if there is any washerwoman here?"

"Of course we can. Oh jolly! here's the breakfast."

In came Mrs. Warner with a tray, bearing our breakfast. We were soon seated, and, with ravenous appetites, attacked the provisions.

"Ugh!" said Ben, with a wry face.

"Ugh!" echoed I, with a wryer.

"Candles!" ejaculated Ben, referring to the butter.

"Yes—*tallow* candles!" from me.

"Oh!" he cried, after tasting the coffee.

"Ah!" cried I; "and why is it grey, instead of brown?"

We stared at each other in mute consternation; then we burst into hearty laughter.

"I dare say she was hurried in making it," I said.

"But that wouldn't make the butter taste of candles," remarked Ben.

"No, and it wouldn't make the bread taste of mice," I rejoined.

"Have you ever tasted mice, dear?"

"No; but this bread tastes as my dormouse cage used to smell."

"Well, we must try not to mind," said Ben, cheerily. "Perhaps we shall get used to the flavour, and even like it."

"I don't believe that!" I stoutly maintained.

"At all events," said Ben, "we mustn't let Mrs. Warner think that we don't like the grub. It is so kind of her to take us in."

"Yes indeed," I assented, "what should we have done without her? I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world."

"The eggs are really good," said Ben, anxious to praise something.

"Ah Ben," said I, "we have had to learn another lesson! We didn't half value the good, wholesome food we had at home, and all the lovely cleanliness. We never thought a bit about it. At the 'Crown and Anchor' everything was so nice and so comfortable, that we did not miss our beautiful home. It serves us right—doesn't it?"

Ah! but those were *such* small troubles—compared with the sharp and bitter chastisement that awaited me. God knows how richly I deserved it!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER breakfast we found our way to the beach. The day was gloriously fine; hardly a ripple broke upon the shore. We flung ourselves down upon the shingle, and lazily threw little pebbles into the water. It was very charming and pleasant, being there; for we were alone upon the beach, and the solitude and quiet were so delightful, after all the scenes we had lately gone through. At last I dropped off into a sound sleep.

I must have slept some time, when a noise awoke me. A fishing boat had just beached close to us, and the boatmen were shipping their oars. Then they proceeded to land their cargo, many of the fish being still alive, floundering about, their glittering scales showing silver, gold, purple, blue, in the sunshine.

"Let's buy a fish for dinner!" cried Ben. "Hallo! fisherman, will you sell me a fish?"

"Not a live one! Oh, the poor things!" said I.

After some negotiation, Ben became the fortunate possessor of a fine (dead) sole, which he proposed to carry home by a string run through its gills.

"What larks!" he exclaimed. "Fancy carrying home one's own dinner! How shall we have it cooked?"

"Fried," I answered, "with egg and bread crumbs."

"How do they make the egg and bread crumbs stick on to the fish, I wonder?" asked Ben.

"Gum, perhaps," I replied, "or glue."

"No, Winnie dear, that would taste! Are you quite sure egg and bread crumbs are used?"

"Yes; for I asked once, at dinner, why some fish were pale coloured and smooth, and others crumbly-fied and yellow; and Miss Parsons said the pale fish were boiled, and the others were fried with egg and bread crumbs. And it is the same with chops and veal cutlets, and lots of other things that look yellow and browny-fied."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Ben. "What a good cook you would make, Winnie!"

"Yes, I think I should," replied I, with tranquil assurance; "but I want *practice* you know. It is such a pity Aunt Jem

would not let us go into the kitchen more. We could have learnt to cook so many things."

"I think we ought to learn," said Ben, very gravely. "Suppose we happen to be in lodgings where there was no cook, how *should* we manage?"

"I think I could cook if I tried," said I.

"Have you ever cooked anything dear?" asked Ben.

"Yes, when my hen laid her first egg, I asked cook to let me boil it for Papa's breakfast. She was in a very good temper that day, and she let me."

"How did you do it, dear?"

"Well, it was quite easy. Cook put some boiling water into a saucepan on the fire. Then she put the egg into a large spoon. Then she gave it to me, and I very softly let it down into the water. Then she stood watching the sand run from the top of the little glass into the bottom. Then just as the last grain was falling through, she was taking up the large spoon to take the egg out ——"

"Well dear?" asked Ben, with breathless interest.

"Well, of course I thought that if she took it out, I should not have boiled the egg; so I caught the spoon from her, and dipped for the egg. But, not being used to cooking, and an egg being a restive sort of a thing to manage, it jumped out of the spoon, and fell into the fender, and was broken all to smithereens."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Ben. "What did you do?"

"I said, 'Beast of an egg!' and began to cry. And then cook comforted me, and asked me to try again with another egg; but that wouldn't have been the same thing at all. So I gave up cooking, from that time. Yet I should like to try again some day."

"Won't the fish be nice? Doesn't the sea air make one peckish?" asked Ben.

"Awfully," I replied. "We'll dine, as soon as Mrs. Warner can cook the dinner."

We had been out some hours, and found, on our return, that Mrs. Warner, after having waited for some time in the hope of our coming back for an early dinner, had been obliged to leave by the three o'clock train for Prestford, in order to purchase butcher's meat and other things which we should require. She had only just left, we were told by Mr. Warner, who was on the point of starting for the railway.

"My Missis—leastways I mean my good lady—thought perhaps you'd be back for tea and eggs if you didn't care for dinner so late," he added. "She had got a chicken and sausages, if you had come in earlier."

"Oh never mind," said Ben, "we shall do very well."

After Mr. Warner had left us, Ben and I stared at each other in dismay. "It doesn't matter," I said, "the servant can cook, I dare say."

But no amount of ringing the bell, procured any answer to our summons.

"Perhaps there *is* no servant," suggested Ben.

"How very horrid!" I exclaimed.

"An idea!" he cried. "Let us try to cook our own dinner!"

"Of course we will! You delightful boy!" I responded. "Here is a fine opportunity for me to practise my cooking. Let us find the kitchen."

This was easily done; and fortunately the fire was in.

"Now, for a frying-pan," said I. "Or, should it be a gridiron? I should know them apart, if I saw them."

"What's this?" asked Ben, selecting a saucepan from among three or four very grimy ones in a corner.

"No," I said, rather doubtfully, "I don't think that can be it. Oh! here is one! But first, ought we not to wash the fish?"

"Of course," assented Ben; "I'll pump some water into this tub. There—that will do. Now, pitch in the fish."

It slipped out of my hands, and "pitched" into the tub with a flop that sent the water all over us.

"Never mind," said Ben, trying to dry me with the table-cloth, "we shall soon dry over the fire."

"Where are those eggs he spoke of, I wonder!" mused Ben.

"In the shop, very likely," I replied.

"Oh! it's all right; this door leads into the shop. How very convenient! Ah, here they are." And I carried a small basket-full of eggs into the kitchen.

"Eight eggs," said Ben, counting them. "Is that enough?"

"We must make them do," I replied, in a tone of calm superiority.

"Hallo!" said Ben, "there's somebody rattling at the shop door. Why don't they come in?"

"Go and see what they want, Ben, while I pin this towel round me for an apron," I said.

Through the open door which communicated with the shop, I saw Ben unlock the shop door, and admit a customer. Seeing me watching him, he winked at me, and then retired behind the counter, as though he were a young person employed to serve.

"What did you please to want, mem," asked the wicked boy, in exact imitation of Mrs. Warner.

"A 'a'penny reel o' cotton," was the answer, from a very dirty and diminutive child.

"Allow me to enclose it in paper, mem," minced Ben, with a glance at me. "Good morning mem. Much obliged, mem," he added, taking the halfpenny, and politely opening the door for the egress of the small customer.

"What fun!" exclaimed Ben; "I wish we kept a shop."

"Now for the fish," I said.

"Shouldn't his inside be scooped out?" asked Ben.

"I don't think so, dear. But I *couldn't* do it—it would be *too* nasty!" I replied.

"I remember hearing Uncle say, that the inside of some fish or other ought to be left in, because it made it taste like woodcock. Perhaps it was fried sole," said Ben.

"Very likely," I replied; "so *that* is settled! But now, where is the gum?"

This was a poser; no gum could we find.

"Perhaps it will do as well without," suggested Ben. "Depend upon it, cooks always fuss more than need be, over their dishes."

"Why, goodness gracious!" cried Ben, "we have forgotten the meat! Who ever heard of dining off fish, only?"

"See what you can find in the shop," I suggested. "Where's the fowl he spoke of?"

Ben dived into that mine of wealth, and with a shout of "Hurrah!" returned, bearing in one hand the fowl, and in the other a string of sausages.

"The very thing!" I cried, "We'll boil it! Fried sole and boiled fowl and sausages! Capital!"

"Now, Ben," I continued, "you crumble the bread, while I break these eggs into a basin. By the bye, we may as well set the fowl boiling at once; and this large kettle is full of boiling water. Just the thing!"

I had some trouble to get the bird into the kettle; a saucepan would have been better; but, by leaving the legs hanging out at the top, we managed to make it do. There was no room for the sausages, unless we fried them in the same pan with the sole.

"I don't see why not," said Ben.

"Perhaps they might taste of fish," I suggested.

"Put them on a plate before the fire. They will cook there," said Ben.

"A good idea," I replied.

In time, the eggs were all broken, without much of the shell falling in amongst them, and the crumbs were ready.

"Now for it Ben," I cried, in uncontrollable excitement.

"Shop!" growled a rough voice from that emporium.

"Yes, sir—directly, sir," replied Ben, hurrying to the counter. A navvy, mud-begrimed, unshorn, unwashed, was waiting to be served.

"Who be you?" asked this personage.

"I am the assistant," replied Ben, in his most "slithery" tones.

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Haw! Haw!" roared the navvy. "Well my lad, give us a penn'orth of baccy."

Ben handed him the desired article, took the penny, and returned to his culinary duties.

"He wasn't very polite," complained he, in an injured tone.

"A perfect pig!" I responded, "Never mind! Now for the mixture."

"Here goes!" cried Ben, preparing to launch the bread crumbs into the eggs.

"Stop!" I interposed. "I'm not sure whether the bread crumbs should be added to the eggs, or the eggs to the bread crumbs."

"That is important," said Ben, gravely poising his bowl of bread crumbs in his hands.

"At all events," said I, "we can set it all right by a little extra kneading—or basting—which is it?"

"I am not sure; but I don't suppose it matters," replied Ben.

"Now then," I again urged.

Ben again lifted his bowl of bread crumbs, and began gradually to tilt them into the basin of eggs.

"Shop!"

"Hang that shop!" cried Ben, fairly exasperated. "One can't do credit to one's cookery at this rate!"

"You'll just have to wait!" I called out.

"Drat your imperence! Keep a civil tongue in your head, whoever you are!" was the answer.

"Now go, Ben," I said, when all the crumbs had been gently dropped into the basin.

I glanced into the shop whilst kneading the mixture, and saw a sharp-nosed, red-elbowed woman, with her bare arms a-kimbo.

"Was that you, spoke to me?" she angrily demanded.

"No, it was the other young person, mem," replied Ben.

"Ah! who's he?"

"Not a 'he' at all mem; it's a *her*," answered Ben.

"Who's she?"

"The cook, mem. She hasn't a good temper at the best of times, and when the meat or the fire goes contrairey, she's that worritin', you'd never believe it mem."

"She leads you a fine time of it, I suppose?"

"Oh! dreadful, mem! dreadful!" exclaimed Ben, clasping his hands.

"And who are you, my dear?"

"I am the assistant, mem. Please, what can I please to serve you with, mem?"

"Two ounces of tea, my dear."

"Which quality do you prefer, mem?"

"Two-and-four."

"Excuse me, mem; but as I'm new to the situation, I might make a mistake. Pray make your own election, mem."

"There's only one quality kept here,—two-and-four," she replied.

"Sorry to give you so much trouble mem," apologised Ben, as he took the money. "Can I have the pleasure of offering you any other article, mem?"

"No, that's all. I shall tell Mrs. Warner that she's got a nice civil lad in her shop, and a brazen hussy of a girl in her kitchen. Goodbye, young man."

"Allow me, mem," said Ben, skipping round the counter to the shop door, and holding it open with his best bow. "Any time you are passing, mem, I shall be most happy to serve a lady like you!"

"Oh! Ben, you humbug! how could you keep your countenance!" I asked, after he had relieved his feelings by a good roar of laughter.

"It *was* difficult, when she called me 'a young man,'" said Ben.

"Now, for the mixture!" I resumed. I wonder what's the next thing to be done. I have never looked on, while anything was being fried, but I should think the stuff ought to be well rubbed in, and the sole be then put on the fire till it is done?"

"Are you sure it ought not to be applied like a sort of poultice?" asked Ben.

"I am *not* sure; and it is that, that troubles me, dear," I replied.

"Try the other way then, Winnie."

"Yes, somehow it seems more reasonable."

"How will you know when it is done?"

"By the look of it. When it looks tempting, I shall know it is ready."

"I wish we had the gum," said Ben. "I know it won't stick on without. Shall I hunt again in the shop?"

"Suppose you do. I suspect starch would do nearly as well."

"Why do you think so, Winnie dear?"

"One day I wanted some stiff paste for sticking something in our little theatre; and nurse said she had put some starch into it to make it extra strong."

Off went Ben on a raid to the shop. "What's this?" he asked, returning with some blue-looking lumps of something.

"*That* is starch!" I joyfully exclaimed. "I have seen some of our poor people use it for their washing."

"Won't it make the fish blue?" asked Ben.

"No, it can't do that, because it doesn't make their clothes look blue," I replied authoritatively. "On the contrary, I believe it will bleach (I think that's the word) the sole a most beautiful white."

"How is it used?" asked Ben.

"Scrape it up with your knife dear," I replied, "and sprinkle it over the fish after it is in the pan."

"Why not mix it with the eggs?"

"Well, perhaps that will be better."

So the sole was carefully deposited in the frying pan, the

mixture was poured over it, and then it was lifted on to the fire. Then we sat down to watch and wait.

"Look at the fowl!" cried Ben. "He's took with fits!"

The water containing that unhappy bird, was boiling furiously; and the legs of the biped were gyrating in mad circles, in their vain attempts to escape from the kettle.

"It will soon be done, and ought to be *very* tender," said Ben. "It couldn't boil harder."

"The sausages don't seem to be getting on," I remarked.

"Perhaps they don't require much doing," replied Ben. "I fancy they are already cooked, before they are sold, and only want to be made nice and hot for the table."

"Yes, you are right Ben. That German sausage that we used to have sometimes at breakfast, was always eaten cold."

"It is not such a difficult thing cooking—is it—?" asked Ben.

"No indeed," I replied; "it seems to come quite naturally. But then, you know, this is not my first attempt, dear, and perhaps I have a *turn* for cooking."

When the fowl had been boiling furiously, and the fish frying, for about an hour, we thought we would lay the dinner table in the drawing-room. It took us much hunting about to find the various things ("appurtenances" Ben called them); but at last all was ready, and we laid two dishes on the kitchen table to receive the dinner. We thought we would serve them both at once, not to have to come down for the second course. We had long ago given up all thought of attending to the shop. Several customers had rattled at the door, and had gone away when no heed was paid to their rattling.

We had placed a cover over the fish to keep it hot, and to quicken the process of cooking. I now lifted the cover off, and Ben held a large dish before the fire, to receive the fish. I tilted up the frying-pan. Off slid the contents with an unexpected "splosh!" which bespattered us both from head to foot.

"Never mind!" I manfully exclaimed; "we can clean afterwards."

Ben placed the dish upon the table.

Alas! Alas! Alas!

We could have cried; so great was our disappointment. A horrid pulpy mixture, of a brilliant blue colour, greeted our

eyes, instead of the tempting golden brown sole we had confidently expected to see! Our grief was too deep for words. We gazed in speechless anguish upon the sad ruin of our bright day-dreams. Ben was the first to speak.

"It is evident we have made some mistake somewhere."

"Oh dear! oh dear! how dreadfully sad!" I lamented.

"Would you like me to taste it, Winnie?" asked Ben.

"Not for the world!" I promptly replied.

"Well," he added, with a deep sigh, "at all events we have the chicken and sausages."

As neither of us could lift the huge saucepan off the fire, we decided to haul the chicken out by its legs.

Tug! Tug! But the chicken, or rather fowl (for it was not a young bird) resisted.

"Beast of a fowl!" exclaimed Ben.

"Brute of a bird," I ejaculated.

"What *shall* we do?" wailed Ben.

"Try again, Ben dear. As he got in, he ought to be able to get out."

We tried again. The obdurate bird seemed to be yielding to the force of circumstances.

"He's coming!" cried Ben, wildly excited.

"Pull harder, dear," I urged.

I was employed in pushing with a board against the kettle, to prevent its falling off the fire. Unfortunately we did not take due precautions to preserve the balance of power; or rather, we did not calculate upon every possible contingency. Ben threw all his strength into one mighty effort, and off came the leg in his hands. He staggered back, and nearly fell, the saucepan swerved, tilted over, and fell into the grate. We had only just time to jump out of the way, and save ourselves from scalding. The boiling water poured into the grate, and about the floor; then out rushed a volume of steam.

"Oh dear! what a mess!" I ejaculated, almost crying.

Ben stood aside, gazing ruefully at the limb, so rudely torn from its socket.

"Well, well," I dolefully began, "we must try to make the best of things. Let us get the fowl out of the saucepan."

But how? The scalding heat prevented our doing it with our hands.

"The tongs!" exclaimed Ben.

I seized the tongs, wiped them on my extemporised apron, and directing Ben to keep the kettle steady, by planting one foot firmly upon it, made a dive into the interior.

"I've got hold of him!" I triumphantly exclaimed, giving a tug.

The remaining leg instantly vanished into the kettle, and in its stead appeared the head of the unhappy bird.

"Hurrah!" shouted Ben, "pull away! His whole body must follow!"

Not a bit of it! That most perverse of bipeds must have been on bad terms with the various members of his body corporate, and anxious to part with them. Off came the head and neck, just as the leg had done!

"Did you ever know such an aggravating bird?" asked Ben.

"Never mind," I replied, "we won't give in to him, even if we have him out bit by bit. Try again."

In his zeal Ben plunged his hand into the kettle, but as quickly withdrew it. "Oh my!" he cried, "isn't it hot?"

We sat down to rest, and gazed upon the dismembered head, lying upon the floor in front of us.

"What an odd looking head," I observed.

"Very," replied Ben; "I don't remember the chickens looking like that at dinner at home."

"Why—Ben?"

"What?"

"They *hadn't* heads!"

"No more they had! I suppose we ought to have cut it off."

After a good laugh, we again tried our hand at the fowl, which we at last succeeded in extricating, bit by bit, from its durance vile, and laying, in a dishevelled state, upon the dish.

"Well, it is better than nothing," I remarked. "You carry it upstairs Ben, and I will bring the sausages."

When we had landed the banquet safely in our sitting-room, we found that we had forgotten the plates; so we had to search for them. When found, we sat down to table, *vis-à-vis*. Then, looking at the untempting viands before us, and meeting each other's rueful gaze, we burst into a fit of laughter, and could hardly stop.

"Now for it!" cried Ben. "You carve the chicken, and I'll dole out the sausages."

"Oh yes! 'carve' indeed!" was my ironical rejoinder. "Suppose you just try." And I pushed the dish towards him.

"What *can* make it so tough?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "I'm sure it couldn't possibly have boiled harder."

"It must be a *very* old bird," said Ben, "and it wouldn't have been tender, no matter how hard you boiled it."

"Yes, that's it," I assented.

There was no help for it, but for Ben to hold tight to the body of the wretched bird, while I, with both hands, dragged off a wing. After that, I performed the same kind office for him. Then we paused for breath.

We must have been strange looking objects, splashed all over with the blue contents of the frying-pan. My large apron had saved my dress to a great extent; but my face, neck, and hands, were picturesquely mottled with blue, as were also Ben's. We no doubt bore a striking resemblance to the woad-stained ancient Britons. We had given each other a hasty "rub down" with the apron, and had been too hungry to do more. The sausages looked too untempting for a trial; and as the fowl was invulnerable to the attack of the knife, we had to fall back upon bread after all.

Presently we heard a key inserted in the shop door; and in came Mr. Warner, off duty.

"My!" he exclaimed, on entering the kitchen, "whatever has happened?"

Thereupon we gave him a detailed account of our disasters. After looking grave, he gave way to a good fit of laughter.

"Well, well," he said, "it could not be helped, I suppose; but my missis—I mean, my good lady, will be put out, if she comes home and finds all this mess."

"We'll help you to clean it up, shall we, Mr. Warner?" asked Ben.

"Yes, my dear, if you will. My missis—I mean, Mrs. Warner—will be back soon, and she's very particular—has been used to good society, you know; all her family so genteel."

We set to work with a will, and, in about an hour, had cleared away all traces of the catastrophe.

And so ended our first and last attempt at cookery.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE end of the week had come—Saturday. The day was brilliantly fine, the sky clear as crystal, the sea like a mirror. We were stretched lazily on the beach, watching nothing in particular, thinking of nothing especial, only enjoying a sort of dreamy happiness. But thoughts seldom lie unproductive for long, especially in childhood; and at last Ben spoke.

"It is very sweet—perfectly delicious—being here by the sea. I could stop here for months and months, if only we had dear Father and nurse——"

"— And Pearl, and kittums, and Vixen," I put in.

"And Miss Parsons," said Ben.

"Ah! *And who else*, Ben?"

"Miss Gascoign, of course," he exclaimed.

"How nice it would be, if we had her here now, Ben! She would sit here with us, and laugh and talk, and say funny things, and tell us stories that would make us laugh and cry by turns."

"Yes," responded Ben; "and now and then she would sing us some of her sweet soft songs. Oh! *wouldn't* it be jolly to have her here?"

"Ah!" I sighed; "I dread seeing her again, though. She must think it so cruel of us to grieve dear Father so."

"Yes, because she is so tender hearted, that she can't bear to think anyone is unhappy. Winnie, everybody has *some* fault you know. Now, what can be Miss Gascoign's?"

"Well, she used to say she has 'an uncertain character.' I wonder what she meant? I have heard Mr. Gascoign tell her that she was too timid and vac—vac—. Bother the word! I can't remember it!"

"Oh, *I* do," said Ben; "such an odd word;—'vaccinating.' What can it mean?"

"No dear, that was not the word exactly, though very like it. Vac—vac—vas—Fascinating? No, it was not that, either. But it meant *uncertain*, hesitating; not having the courage to say 'yes' or 'no' exactly at the right moment; or to do exactly the thing that ought to be done, just *when* it

ought to be done. I remember her saying, that this was quite true, and that this fault of hers had given her much trouble from time to time. She called it 'a want of *determination* and *firmness*.'"

"Winnie, darling, I feel somehow as if it can never again be the same with the people we have loved so dearly. This running away can never be got over."

I sighed. I could not contradict him. We were silent for some time; then, from thinking of home, my thoughts naturally flew to the advertisement in the "Times," which we expected next Wednesday.

"It is very nice here, Ben," I said; "but we can't get the 'Times,' as there are no shops; so we must leave next Monday or Tuesday, to be in some place where there are shops, next Wednesday."

"Why wait for that, Winnie darling?" pleaded Ben, with a timid, appealing glance at my face. "We *know* our father loves us dearly! We *know* he is troubling about us!"

"Perhaps that ogre of a woman has turned him quite against us," I replied.

"No, no, Winnie! No one could turn him against *us!*"

"I would rather wait till we have seen his answer in the 'Times,' I evasively replied. "It will be so much nicer to be asked to return; to feel sure of a welcome."

"Then I suppose we must leave here on Monday?" asked Ben.

"Yes dear, I think so. Besides, our boots, and gloves, and stockings, won't hold out longer, if even they last till then. As Mrs. Warner is kind enough to wash our linen, we need not buy more. That is a great help."

"How I should like to go out in that boat, and help to catch some fish," said Ben.

Two fishermen and a lad were just preparing to shove a boat into the sea. It looked very tempting.

"Let us ask them to take us!" I cried, springing to my feet. Ben jumped up too, and in a few minutes we were seated in the boat, and being pushed off. When just afloat, the last man jumped lightly in, and off we went.

"Do you want to go out far, young master?" asked the older man of the two.

"Oh no," I replied, for him; "we are not used to the sea, and if a storm came on we should be frightened."

"No fear of a storm, Miss," said the younger man, with a good-humoured smile.

"Can we fish?" asked Ben.

"If you like, young master; but you'll catch nothing but small whiting so far in-shore as this."

"Small whiting are delicious," I replied ("and we won't cook them ourselves, this time Ben!" I added in a whisper.)

We rowed out to about a quarter of a mile from the shore, and then lay-to, while the men prepared the lines, and the boy busied himself with the bait. We leant over the edge of the boat, gazing down into the water, cool, green, clear as crystal. We could see the bottom; fine sand, with, here and there, rock, and sea-weed. It was most enjoyable.

"Take care master," said the old boatman, "or you'll be overboard. It's easy to do it?"

I laughed. "Why, it is so shallow, it wouldn't matter."

"Shallow?" echoed the fisherman. "It's deep enough to drownd you, and the young master, and me, and my mate, and the lad there, all standing one-a-top of the other."

I shuddered, and drew Ben a little further back.

"Can you swim?" asked the younger man.

"No; my father says I must learn some day. He says every boy ought to learn to swim."

"Yes, and girl too. This lad here could swim like a duck when he was five year old; and now there's nothing beats him."

"Is he your son?" I asked, looking at the bronzed, weather-beaten lad, shoeless, stockingless, in his striped cotton shirt and serge trousers.

"Aye, aye; one of six."

"Now then, Miss," said the other man, "here's your line. As soon as ever you see that float bob under water, that's a bite; but you mustn't pull up directly—not till the fish has got well hooked. Here's yours, master."

It was thrilling! We could see the fish swimming about beneath us. Some of them would even come up to the bait, examine it, and then go off. We got no bite yet.

"We must put off a little yet," said one of the men; "they can see us; its rather too clear here."

We put off a little further, and let out more line. My float bobbed under. In an instant, forgetting the fisherman's advice, I frantically hauled in my line, and found nothing on it,—not even the bait.

"Ah! you shouldn't be in such a hurry! More bait, Joe," said his father, tossing him my line.

"A bite! a bite!" whispered Ben, in thrilling tones; and the next moment he had pulled up a whiting about as big as a mouse.

"Splendid!" cried Ben. "Oh! fishing is a glorious sport!"

My line was now launched, and in about two minutes I too landed my fish. After that the fun grew fast and furious. Ben sat on one side of the boat; I the other. Though our backs were turned towards each other, we knew, by our exclamations, all that was going on. Joe was fully employed in baiting, so fast did the fish bite.

I was absorbed in intense contemplation of my float, which was just bobbing under, when I heard a sudden splash. The boat swayed; I turned round. Ben was gone! gone, gone to the bottom of the cruel sea!

I sprung forward. I should have plunged in after him, but a strong arm restrained me, and held me down. It was the younger sailor; the old one steadied the boat. I struggled, but in vain; and, before I had time to think, the boy Joe had dived under the dreadful water, and, the next moment, was clinging to the side of the boat, with Ben in his arms.

They told me, afterwards, that the whole affair, from first to last, was over in about half a minute; but to me, it seemed a lifetime. During those few moments of horror and agony, the whole of my little brother's sweet, unselfish life, flashed through my brain in a swift succession of pictures, bright, sharp, clear, as though limmed with an electric pencil; and, for the first time, I knew what a mighty love I bore him; I knew that my all-in-all had gone down there, under that dreadful water.

They drew him in—my darling, my treasure!—drew him in, living, breathing! and his first glance was at me; a faint, sickly, loving smile. Then he fainted. I would have caught him in my arms; but the old sailor knew better.

"No, no, Miss," he said; "lay him flat; never lift a body in a faint. They comes-to sooner if you lays 'em flat. You just keep a'nighst him, so that he'll see you the first thing when he wakes. There!"

We waited a little. My brother's eyes were closed; the blue veins on his forehead stood out. He looked as if life had left him.

"No, no, Miss, he's all right. Don't you take on," said the kind old boatman. "He'll soon come to and be all right, poor little lad! Bob, give me the brandy?"

He sponged the poor little lips and nostrils with the spirit. There was a slight twitching of the mouth, and my darling opened his eyes. For a moment or two he did not speak; his gaze rested upon me, and met mine, filled with a yearning agony of love. I laid my cheek against his, and whispered, "Ben, Ben! Oh my darling!" Then he smiled, and said, "I'm all right, Winnie dear."

The old man poured a very little brandy into a cup, and held it to his lips; but Ben turned aside in disgust.

"He is not used to it," I said.

"Get him to take a drop, Miss! He'll take it for you," pleaded the boatman.

"It would choke him, as it is. Put a little water in it, please," I said.

"Water?—ah, well!—Bob, give me Joe's water-can. That will do."

"Try to swallow a little, Ben. For *my* sake, darling."

Ben resisted no longer, and the dose revived him. In a few minutes he sat up, and said he felt quite well. I did not believe it.

"Now we'll pull ashore," said Bob. "He must be got home and sent to bed, and wropped up in hot blankets."

"Come in now, Joe," said the older man.

And then I found that the brave young sailor lad who had saved my Ben's life, had been left swimming about all the time.

"Oh! why didn't he come in before?" I cried. "He might have been drowned!"

"He? You might as well try to drown a fish!" laughed the father. "He would have canted the boat in getting in. We wanted to keep the little lad steady on his back."

Directly Joe was in the boat, I flung my arms round his neck, all dripping as he was, and gave him a good hug. "You dear brave boy!" I cried, the tears streaming down my cheeks. "You dear brave boy!"

I could say nothing more than that; I felt too much. The boy was quite taken aback, and, covered with confusion, sat down in the bows, and set to work to wind up the lines, in the most matter-of-fact way, as though nothing particular

had happened. A few minutes later, we were close to the shore. Three good strokes of the oars sent our boat on the beach. The boatmen leaped out, and ran her up high and dry.

"I'll carry you home, master," said the younger man.

"No thank you," replied Ben, "I can walk quite well."

"Try another nip, Master," suggested the old man.

"Do, Ben dear; for *me!*" I pleaded; and the "nip" was swallowed, though with a wry face.

"I won't stop to pay you now," I said to the old boatman, "because I want to get my brother home quickly; but *would* you kindly come with us, and bring your 'nip?' He might turn faint. And Joe too? If I wanted to send for a doctor, he would, perhaps, be so very kind as to go for one."

"All right Miss. Come along Joe." The boy had hastily pulled on his shoes and stockings, and we now set forth. Ben walked pretty well; but his teeth chattered, and he looked blue and cold. We were not long in getting home; and by the time we arrived there, the exercise and the "nip" had somewhat restored his circulation. A few hasty words explained matters to Mrs. Warner, who at once drew the sheets from my bed, and laid a warming-pan between the blankets. The old man, who said "He'd a' seed a' many cases like this," insisted on undressing Ben, and rubbing him down with hot flannels. Then he borrowed one of Mr. Warner's flannel shirts, heated it, as he said "red hot," slipped it over Ben's shoulders, and tumbling him into bed, tucked him in comfortably, and came to call me. Meanwhile Mrs. Warner and I had been getting ready some hot soup. This, I now took to Ben, and fed him with; a spoonful at a time. He soon told me, "he was as well as if he had never had a ducking, and as warm as a toast."

Then he fell into a deep sleep, which lasted some hours.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Ben woke, it was evening. I had sat beside him all the while, scarcely daring to breathe, lest I should wake him; and all that time, I had been thinking—thinking; yet I had not thought out all my thoughts, nor all the resolutions which sprung from them, when he awoke. Mrs. Warner had once softly opened the door, with a cup of tea in her hand, which she had mutely offered to me; but I had signed to her to withdraw.

"What is it?" asked Ben, rubbing his eyes. "Where am I? What room is this?"

"My room, dear," I answered, bending down to kiss his soft little cheek. "Are you comfortable?"

"*Your* room, Winnie? Oh! what a shame! How did I come here? Have I been ill? But I'm quite well now, and so hungry. Ah! I remember it all! How long have I been asleep?"

"Some hours, darling."

"Oh, poor Winnie! And have you had nothing to eat all that time?"

"I have not been hungry, dear."

"You *ought* to be hungry. Come, let us have dinner," he urged.

"Mrs. Warner will cook some chops in a very little time, dear," I replied. "Could you eat a chop, do you think?"

"Couldn't I, neither!" he exclaimed, sitting up in bed. The next minute he was laughing heartily at the strange fit of Mr. Warner's flannel shirt. As his own clothes were now dry, they were brought to him, and he was soon dressed. Meanwhile Mrs. Warner got our dinner ready; so we were soon seated in our little room, and managed to make a comfortable meal. Suddenly I stopped, with my fork poised midway in the air.

"Oh Ben!" I exclaimed.

"What, dear?"

"The good old sailor, and the splendid boy who saved your life! I've forgotten them, through thinking of nothing but you!"

Mrs. Warner on being summoned, told me that they had

gone away, on hearing that Ben had fallen asleep. She added, that the boatman had said that I owed him nothing, and that he was sorry we had not had a pleasanter time on the water. I was not to "take on" about the little gentleman, as he would be none the worse for his dip.

"I *must* see them again! I couldn't be happy without it," I cried. "If Mr. Warner would be so very kind as to ask him to come and see us,—and the boy too——"

"Certainly mem; Mr. Warner will be most 'appy, mem," replied our landlady. And with this I had to be contented.

We sat close together at the window, my arm round my little Ben's neck, his sweet face resting against my shoulder. I was very quiet.

"How you keep thinking, Winnie dear," he said. "Don't think any more about it; it is all over now."

"Yes, thank God! oh, thank God!" I replied. "But I am not thinking of that, only."

"What besides, darling?"

"Of so many things, that I could not speak half of them in days. Of my whole life.

"Tell me some of them, darling."

"Home. Father. Nurse. You."

"What about them, Winnie?"

"I made home wretched. I thought only of myself, and of what *I* liked. I wouldn't put up with the least thing that went against *me*, though I didn't mind what trouble I gave others. I filled the whole house with discord."

"Oh no, Winnie! No!"

"Don't excuse me, Ben! Don't let me off! I hate myself!"

"Oh! my darling Winnie! And you, so good!"

"Poor Father! Dear, precious Father. I used to see such pain and trouble in his face, when I quarrelled and disputed with Aunt Jemima. I didn't care; all I cared for, was to get my own way in everything. And yet I thought I loved Father."

My tears were pouring down like rain. Ben tried to kiss them away. I resumed.

"And dear old nurse!—the life I led her! She was so loving and patient, and so uncomplaining! Looking back, now, it seems as if I had given her nothing but hard words and impatient looks, whenever the least thing put me out."

"Oh Winnie! Nurse knew you loved her!"

"And you, my darling, that I love best of all; how I have treated you! The night we started, when you, wiser than I, begged and implored me to turn back, I reproached you with being 'like a girl.' Like a girl? you, my own, so brave and true!"

"Oh! Winnie—Winnie—don't cry so! Indeed you are wrong. I was more to blame than you,—being a boy."

"No Ben—not so. Because you loved me, you copied me in everything. *You* would never have destroyed our father's home and happiness!"

The shadows had been falling fast while we had been talking, and it was now dusk. Mrs. Warner came to tell us that the boatman and the boy were below. We gladly went downstairs.

"Glad to see the little master all right again," said the old man.

Joe stood behind, a mere cipher; Joe, in my eyes, the greatest hero upon earth.

"I wanted to see you again, to thank you for your kindness to Ben," I said. "But I can never, never thank Joe enough for saving my brother's life! I shall never forget you, Joe, as long as I live!"

"Oh! its nothing miss, its nothing," said the old man. "Joe's like a duck in the water. If I'd a dropped my old knife overboard he'd a'dived for it, all's one. Wouldn't 'ee, lad?"

"Yes, uncle," answered the boy.

"And, if you please," I faltered, "you must let me pay for our row, though it did turn out so unfortunately. It was not your fault, for you warned us; but Ben got so excited with the fishing, that he lost his balance."

"Yes, it was all my fault," pleaded Ben. "I spoilt the whole thing."

"Well, if you *will* have it," answered the boatman, "suppose we say five shillings, miss, and blow me if I takes a brass farthing more!"

I gave him the five shillings, and he turned to go. Joe was following, but I detained him.

"You must shake hands with us, Joe," I said. "Now, remember what I am going to say. We shall soon be at home again, and shall tell our father what has happened,

and how you saved Ben's life. Our father will think nothing too good to do for you now, or for all your life, Joe. Here is our address written on this paper. If you ever want anything done for you—*anything*, mind!—come and tell our father."

Joe looked quite dazed. He could not be brought to see that he had any claim upon our gratitude.

"And please to accept this, Joe. Don't think we are trying to pay you—we could never do that! Only, please to accept it from us." And I slipped five sovereigns into his hand.

"Thank you Miss," he replied, dropping the money into his pocket without looking at it. "I'll send it to Granny."

"Your grandmother?"

"Yes Miss—Father's mother. She's got the rheumatics, and this will buy her a fine new flannel petticoat."

"Good bye Joe," we both said, shaking hands with him. We watched him disappear into the dusk, and then returned to our room, where Mrs. Warner soon brought our tea. That over, I again fell into thought.

"Thinking again, Winnie darling?" said Ben, laying his little head caressingly upon my shoulder. "What is it this time."

"Only part of all the long train of sad thoughts which began, that dreadful night at the 'Swan,' Ben dear. I have not, since then, felt like the child I was before. I never shall again!"

"Oh Winnie! don't say that!"

"Yes darling, it is right to say it, and to think it too. I can never think too much over it."

The dear little fellow was silent.

We sat at the window, looking out vaguely into the dusk. He kept smoothing my hand as it lay in his.

"Ben," I said, suddenly breaking the silence, "the right thing to do, is to go home at once."

"Yes Winnie—yes!" he exclaimed, with a quick catching of his breath.

"But, ought we to go home in tatters, to disgrace them?" I asked.

"We shall be sure to pass through some town or other on our way home," he replied. "It will be easy to get stockings and boots."

"So it will. Oh Ben, I feel so much happier, now that we have decided to go home."

"When shall we start?" he eagerly demanded.

"To-morrow. No, that will be Sunday. Monday, then."

"Monday. It seems a long time to wait, doesn't it, Winnie?"

"Yes, Ben dear. But when we were at the 'Crown and Anchor,' we didn't care for going back home. It is a good thing that we have been brought to our senses."

"Perhaps we may get home by Tuesday," pursued Ben.

"Yes; only we don't know where we are now. We may be many hundred miles away. Oh Ben! to see dear Father once more, and nurse, and Miss Parsons, and dear Pearl and Vixen, and the precious kitten! (How she will be grown!) To think of seeing them again so soon!" I cried.

"I would rather bear anything than leave home again," said Ben.

"So would I; we have had to put up with a great deal more, away from home, than we should if we had stayed there."

So we talked on, till it was nine o'clock, and Mrs. Warner came to ask whether we did not want candles. When they were brought, feeling quite tired out, we thought we might as well go to bed.

"I shall go up with you dear," I said. "I have not seen your room yet."

"Don't come," he pleaded, "you are too tired."

"Not a bit, dear; I want to see the last of you," I answered.

"*Don't* come Winnie!" he persisted.

"But I will!" said I. And on I went, up a steep little flight of stairs, at the top of which was a tiny landing, with two low doors on either side.

"This door," said Ben, pointing to the right-hand one, "is only a lumber cupboard. That one is my room. Now, good night, dear."

But I persisted, for I wanted to see his room. It was a wretched attic, or rather, loft, almost open to the sky. The unceiled tiles admitted the only air and light to be had in this den, for window there was none. The furniture was most sordid, and the apartment contained neither chair nor toilet-table.

I was speechless with indignation. Ben looked sadly dis-

tressed, and pleaded, "If you only knew how soundly I sleep here, Winnie!"

"And you never complained—oh! Ben!"

"Its good enough for a boy, Winnie. I'm only a boy, you know!"

"Never mind, dear; we shall soon have our own old rooms again. How we used to lean out of our windows at night, and talk in the moonlight, instead of going to bed."

"To be at home again—at home!" I sighed, with an aching, yearning desire for all that I had flung aside so lightly, only six weeks ago. "Oh, Ben, it seems as if I couldn't wait till next Tuesday, to be there!"

Aye, but I had to wait longer than that! Next Tuesday!

The shadows were gathering around me, ready to fall, and enshroud me in nethermost darkness.

Next Tuesday!

CHAPTER XXVII.

WE had just sat down to breakfast the next morning, when Mrs. Warner came to tell us that the younger boatman and his son Joe wanted to speak to me. We went downstairs, and found Bob in "a great taking."

"We didn't find out the mistake till this morning, Miss," he began; "for Joe left the money in his pocket, and so I never saw it; but you made the mistake through its being dark when you gave it."

Thereupon he produced five sovereigns, carefully wrapped in a piece of paper, and continued—

"Instead of giving my lad five shillings, you gave him five sovereigns, Miss; and here they are."

"Oh no," I replied, "I meant to give five sovereigns, and I wish they were fifty!"

Bob seemed utterly astounded, and stammered, "But Miss, it wouldn't be fair, to take so much money from a little lady and gentleman like you! And the boy did nothing to earn it."

"My father would have given much more," I replied. "Joe saved my brother's life. We shall always feel more grateful than I can tell. We can never *pay* Joe! never—never!"

"Indeed, you must let Joe keep it," added Ben. "Our father would be displeased with us if we didn't insist upon it."

This settled the matter, and then Joe said,—"Father, may I go to Prestford to-morrow, and take the five pounds to granny?"

"Yes lad; she was a mother to you when your mother died; aye—and better than many a mother. Give the money to your granny."

How much depended upon that five pounds, and Joe's visit to Prestford!

They took their leave, and then we strolled out for a walk, and, seeing people going into a little church, went in too.

It was very pleasant, being in a church again; and now that we were in a better frame of mind, we could join heartily in the service, though the singing was rough and uneducated, and the congregation composed of the labouring poor, or of the class just above them. Many sailors were there; and

amongst them we recognised our friends of the day before. The sermon was plain, homely, and practical, and suited to the comprehension of the audience. When the service was over, they all dispersed quietly.

Dinner was ready soon after our return to our lodgings; that over, we sat at the window, which did not look towards the dreadful sea—I shuddered at it now—and talked of home with a yearning all the more intense, now that the time was fixed for our return.

But I had passed a crisis in my life, which comes to all sooner or later, and which had come to me earlier than to most. Experience had been a hard teacher; and my estimate of things had changed. I no longer lived in the present, and I had learnt to distrust the future. I was saddened, subdued, and a world of thought had opened up before me. Would life always be so sad and disappointing? Would it be filled with terrible accidents, heart-breaking tragedies, sudden bereavements, disappointments always? Must everyone—even those who seemed the blithest and freest from thought and care, have to go through all this, and to lose the first buoyant, springing hope in the future, as I had lost it now? My heart sank within me.

"Don't sigh so, Winnie darling," said little Ben, winding his arm round my neck, and drawing down my face for a kiss.

"Did I sigh, dear?" I asked.

"Yes, poor Winnie; you have had so much to trouble you. But cheer up, darling! You will soon be yourself again at home."

"Oh! if I had never left it!" I almost groaned. "Home will not be the same—at least, *I* shall never be the same again—never!"

"Don't talk in that way, Winnie darling! you make me feel unhappy," pleaded the poor dear little fellow.

"Then there is an end of it," I answered, with an attempt at gaiety. "It would never do, for both of us to be in the dolefuls."

"What time shall we start for Prestford to-morrow morning?" asked Ben, after a pause.

"There's no train till ten o'clock," I replied. "Mrs. Warner tells me there are very few trains. The fish train leaves every day at ten; and after that, there is none till three."

"I hope we shall find a train ready to take us on from Prestford," said Ben.

"I don't know," replied I. "Mrs. Warner can't tell me anything about that. We must take our chance."

"Winnie dear," Ben suddenly exclaimed, "I hope we shall find everything at home just as we left it. We have been taking it for granted that we shall; but I don't see that we have any right to."

His words were but the echo of thoughts that had been troubling me for days past. I sadly replied,—

"No indeed; all the dreadful things we have gone through since we left home, might teach us how awfully uncertain is everything."

"The last night you will have to sleep in that horrible loft, you poor darling," I said, kissing his dear bright face as we said good night. "If we have to stop anywhere to-morrow night, we will go to a good hotel, and you shall have the very best bed-room in it."

I little thought!

And so passed our last night at Cellings.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE bill was paid, the farewells said, and we stood on the little platform of the Cellings station. Just as the train came up, Joe arrived, and touched his cap, then stepped into a third-class carriage.

"He is going to take the money to 'Granny'" said Ben.

We took our seats in the carriage, said good-bye to Mr. Warner, and were off. It was a relief to have left Cellings. Since Ben's dreadful plunge into the horrid sea, I had longed to get away. Besides, it was such a comfort to know that every turn of the wheels of our carriage was taking us nearer to home.

Arrived at Prestford, we had to consult the station-master about trains for Hereford. We found there was no train that would answer our purpose, for three hours.

"What shall we do?" asked Ben.

"Oh! here is Joe; perhaps he can tell us of some quiet little inn, where we can rest, and have luncheon."

"I'll tell you what we will do," I said; "we will renovate our damaged wardrobe, while we are waiting."

"So we will," said Ben.

Having ascertained from Joe, which was the nearest way to the town, we started for it. Joe said good-bye, and went briskly on, whistling gaily, at thought of the fortune he was carrying to his dear old granny.

"Along this road for five minutes, then through that gate, then along a path beside a stream, then over a stile and through a field, then over another stile beside a pond, and then you see the town before you, with only one field between."

Such were Joe's instructions, and we prepared to follow them. We went along the dusty road, and through the gate, and along the little path beside the cool and laughing stream, bordered by its pretty banks, with willows bending overhead, and drooping to kiss the pleasant cool water. And the banks were in a tangle of sweet wild flowers and pretty graceful grasses, and the birds were in a fever of innocent delight, and above, a lark was trilling his song of rapture; and all was very sweet and pleasant. And the last few

precious moments of happiness were rushing away with awful speed; and my great misery was close at hand.

We came to the end of the little path, and got over the stile, and walked on steadily through the first field, and then came to the second stile with the pond beside it. Then we sat down to count our money.

"We must be very careful not to run short," I said. "We have a long, expensive journey before us. We will spend as little as possible on our boots and things."

"If they last till we get home, it will do," said Ben.

"I wish we had asked Joe, which were the best shops to go to," I pursued.

"Joe must be with his granny by this time," rejoined Ben. "He went on so fast, poor fellow!"

"Yes," I answered, "he had to be back as soon as possible, to go out fishing with the boat. I dare say we shall meet him as he is coming back."

"We need not hurry," said Ben; "we have lots of time, and it is so pleasant here."

So we sat on, counting our money, and dividing it into little heaps on the top of the stile; sovereigns, one or two notes, and some silver.

It was so cool and pleasant, sitting there, that we trifled with the time, and might have lingered much longer, had we not been disturbed by the sound of footsteps approaching the stile from the town side; and a boy came in sight.

"It's Joe coming back," I said at first; but the next moment, I saw that it was a bigger boy than Joe,—a great, strong, rude-looking boy. To make way for him to get over the stile, I swept all the little heaps of money into my frock, and stood aside to let him pass. He had had to wait a few moments.

"Dash my wig!" he exclaimed, "we are rich here!" And he made a snatch at the money in my lap.

I sprung back, and, gathering it together, huddled it into my pocket, and held it tight.

"Come now, that won't do!" he cried. "You've kept me waiting, and its fair you should pay! Shell out, now!"

"You are a rude, vulgar boy!" I exclaimed, angered at his insolent manner. "I won't give you a farthing!"

"You won't—won't you?" he shouted, seizing me rudely by the shoulder.

That instant, Ben rushed at him like a tiger, and, with the words, "You dare touch my sister!" hit him a blow full in the chest, which made him loose his hold of me, and stagger back. Then Ben, planting himself in front of me, faced the bully, his little head thrown back, his eyes kindling, his face flushed with anger and excitement.

The brute roared out a fierce oath; I heard a dreadful, crushing blow; and my darling, my treasure, the light of my eyes, went down like a stone. And then, blow after blow was aimed, swift as lightning, upon the tender helpless form that lay so senseless there.

Maddened with anguish, I seized the brute by his hair, and tried to wrench him away, but unavailingly. Then, espying a large stone, I hurled it full at him; but it missed its aim. Again I flew at the fierce wretch, and tried to drag him off.

"Aye! aye! aye! aye!" shouted a voice, close at hand.

It was Joe—oh! my brave Joe!

"Hit one of your own size, you big coward!" he cried, dealing out his blows upon the bully, as freely as the brute had done upon my little brother; and with each rattling blow, he cried, "There! there! there!"

The boy tried to escape, but Joe held him tight, and, dragging him to the pond, gave him a thorough ducking. Then he released him, with a good shaking.

The boy clenched his fist, and muttered, "I'll make you pay for this, Joe Winter!"

"Oh, you want some more, do you?" retorted Joe, giving him a good shove. "Now, you be off, or I'll duck you again, Jack Pembroke!"

With his face swollen and disfigured, his nose bleeding, and every bone in his body bruised, the bully slunk away. The whole scene had not occupied half the time that I have taken to describe it. I had lifted Ben's head in my arms, and was frantically calling upon him to speak to me.

"Ben! Ben! Ben!" I wailed.

Joe knelt down, and applied his ear to Ben's side. "I think I can hear his heart beat," he said. "We must carry him along to the town, and get a doctor."

I blindly did as Joe bade me. We made a sort of cradle of our arms, and carried Ben along in that way. His sweet face rested against me, and there was no sign of life in it. I

felt nothing—heeded nothing. A mute despair had seized upon me. In church the day before, I had heard the words, "Behold, I take away the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." They had made a great impression upon me, for they spoke to me of how I had felt, when I had seen my darling go down under the cruel water; and they had been ringing through my brain ever since. And now, that sentence kept repeating itself over and over again, as if to drive me mad with anguish. We bore him through that field, and over the stile. The town lay before us at a little distance, and a few small houses and cottages were scattered irregularly between it and us.

"We will go into the first house we come to," said I.

"They won't take us in there," said Joe.

"Oh! what cruel people!" I cried.

"Yes," he assented, "some people's that crool you wouldn't believe. Nor they won't take us in at the next cottage, neither. But at the next house to that, there are lodgings to let."

"That will do," I said.

"She's a queer sort of woman, Miss," continued Joe; "but young master's very bad—very bad indeed. It *might* be some good to send for a doctor."

He spoke so doubtfully, that I gasped, "He's not dying? Oh, not *that!* not *that!*"

"I don't think he's *dying*," faltered Joe.

"How dare you even *think* the other thing! how *dare* you?" I cried, in my passionate despair.

Joe made no answer.

"Oh Joe! dear good Joe! do say you don't think *that!*"

"I mustn't tell a lie," he stammered. "I'm—I'm afeard——."

I had no more to say. We hurried on, past the first house, and the second. We came to the third.

It was a dull, damp, grey, neglected-looking place, standing in a garden, some way back from the road. Everything about it looked neglected, from the untrimmed plants and borders, and paths full of weeds, to the cracked and unpainted front door, and dirty windows filled with broken panes. But I did not then pay much heed to all this; I was only too thankful to find a shelter for my dying boy. Yes, *dying*,—it had come to that! I clung to the word desperately, for it was better than that other awful word—*dead!*

We could not loose our hands to knock at the door; but Joe kicked at it, which brought the landlady, a tall, gaunt, sharp-faced woman, with thin features, high cheek bones, and small, shrewd, piercing grey-green eyes.

"I've brought you a lodger, Mrs. Macfarlane," said Joe.

"Go away! go away!" cried the woman, trying to shut the door in our face. Joe got his knee in, however, and so prevented her.

"Go away, I tell you!" she reiterated. "That boy is dead. I don't want dead bodies here!"

"He is *not* dead," I insisted; "but he will die if you don't take him in. And then I will have you taken up for murder! Our father will pay you well, for any trouble we may give."

"Well, well," she replied, somewhat mollified, "I didn't know. I thought he was dead. Come in; I'll see what I can do."

"— Got a bed-room ready? Sheets dry?" asked Joe.

"Yes, and a fire-place in the room. We had better carry the poor young gentleman upstairs at once."

"We bore him up between us, and laid him on a bed; and Mrs. Macfarlane, giving Joe the address of her doctor, bade him run off for him at once.

"He's very bad," observed Mrs. Macfarlane. "What has made him so?"

I told her what had happened, and then, recollecting what had given rise to the brutal attack upon my darling, turned the loose money and notes out of my pocket on to the table.

"Hateful, hateful money!" I shudderingly exclaimed, as I gathered it into my purse. Then I sat down to await the doctor's arrival. He was not long in coming. I fixed my gaze upon him with keen anxiety. My heart sank within me. How unlike Dr. Gillias! I had soon explained matters, and looked into his dull, expressionless face, appealingly.

"As long as there is life there is hope," was his trite, hackneyed, common-place reply to my mute appeal. Nevertheless it brought me one ray of comfort.

"Then he is *not* dead?"

"No, but——"

"Yes, yes,—don't say any more," I hurriedly implored. "Is it *possible* he may recover?"

"He is in the Lord's hands!" was the horrid, canting reply.

"Of course," I impatiently replied; "we are *all* in 'the Lords hands;' but do you think he *may* recover."

He lifted my darling's eyelids, again felt his pulse, and again shook his head.

"Oh doctor," I cried, in an agony of supplication, "don't give up hope; because, if you do, you won't try to save him. His life is so precious—to me—to so many. Our father's only son! Oh doctor, our father will give you anything—anything."

I broke down, utterly at a loss for words to express what I felt. I so longed to touch this man's feelings, if he had any, and to interest him in my darling.

The doctor wrote down a few lines on a paper, and sent Joe off with them. Then he sat down beside the bed, and held my Ben's wrist in one hand and his watch in the other, till Joe returned. He had sent for leeches, and when they came, he placed them on my brother's temples. There we sat, watching—watching.

I was the first to notice, that the blue and ghastly pallor on my brother's face, seemed yielding to a healthier hue. White it was—white as a sheet; but no longer that livid, death-like hue. Then I saw—I was sure I saw—a faint twitching of the mouth. I leant forward. We waited, and waited. I sought the doctor's eyes. I thought he smiled. Then, there was hope!

Of how I watched and waited for hours, now in despair, now in faint hope, I cannot tell. It was awful agony, to have to bear it all quietly, to be able to do nothing but watch and wait. The doctor went and came. At last he said, after feeling his pulse, "He is better, but very low. Has he had any nourishment?" I replied, that we had not been able to get him to swallow anything. Whereupon, he uttered a sort of contented grunt, and said, "It did not much matter." He added, that he must go and visit his other patients, as he could do nothing more at present; that he hoped the sufferer "if it were the Lord's will," might fall into a healthy sleep by and bye; if not, "we must submit, and be thankful," etc., etc. I was to send for him if any change appeared.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Macfarlane came into the room, and stood before me, grim and gaunt.

"Anything more I can do for you, Miss?" she asked.

"You are going to bed?"

"Yes; my health requires that I should have nine hours' sleep every night. It is a duty to take care of our health."

How could the woman think—much less speak—of her "health" at such a time? I bent my head in mute acquiescence.

"Any time in the night you may want anything, if you ring this hand-bell, and I hear it, I will come," she added.

"*Will* you hear it, do you think?" I asked.

"I will do my best, but I sleep very heavy."

"Good night then, Mrs. Macfarlane," I sadly replied.

"If we are all spared till the morning," she went on, "the milkman will come. How much milk would you like taken in?"

"Oh, I don't know," I replied, disgusted with the woman's selfishness and cant. "Take what you think right."

The cruel, heartless woman! To leave me, a mere child, alone in the dreary night, with the dear dying boy! As soon as she had left the room, the full sense of my loneliness and desolation came upon me, and I wept hopelessly. Those were the first tears I had shed, since my brother had been struck down, but they brought no relief; hot, scalding, bitter, they furrowed their way down my cheeks, and fell heavily through my clasped hands.

"Oh! my Ben! my Ben!" I thought, gazing upon his dear still face, "how can I bear to give you up? how can I bear to live on for years and years without you?"

I remembered poor Nelly, and felt for her as I had not done when she too had lost "the desire of her eyes." Should I too, go wild and lose my wits, and put an end to myself, as poor Nellie had done.

And then I pitied myself so acutely, that I fell to weeping again; but my tears were softer and gentler, and brought me more relief; and after that I trimmed the little lamp, and again softly approached my brother. I thought his face looked less white—or was it the lamp-light? I bent down to see better.

His lips were slightly parted, his face had a little flush; I could just hear him breathe, very low and quick. He slept!

I slid down upon my knees beside him, and poured out my whole heart in thankfulness to God. Then rising, I sat down in the arm-chair that had been brought for me, and turning my eyes upon my brother, watched. And so thoroughly worn out was I with grief and watching, that I closed my eyes and dozed, though still half awake.

"Winnie! Winnie! Winnie!"

I woke in an instant. Ben was sitting up in the bed, his eyes blazing.

"Darling! darling!" I cried, but he did not know me.

"Winnie! Winnie! Winnie! Where are you? Oh! come to me! come to me!" he entreated.

"I'm here darling—here. Look at me—your own Winnie!"

"Nurse! nurse! take away this hot fire off my head! It is burning my brain!" he cried.

I plunged a towel into cold water, and laid it on his head. It relieved him for a minute or two; but then it became as hot as his poor little head, and he cried piteously, "More cool! more!"

"Water! water! Oh Winnie, they won't give me water!" he wailed. "Where are you, Winnie? Why don't you come to me?"

I could not make him know that I was there; and he kept calling for me incessantly. I opened the door, and rang the hand-bell, but Mrs. Macfarlane did not come. I rang it again, and then a door opened below, and a voice said, "It's me Miss—Joe."

"Oh! dear Joe! good Joe!" Even at that moment of anguish, it sent a thrill to my heart, to know that a friend was at hand, though he was only a poor fisher-lad. "Joe, will you run for the doctor—at once—*very* fast. Ben is in dreadful fever."

"Yes Miss; I thought I'd be wanted, so I stopped. She's a queer woman. I'll go directly."

While he was gone, I constantly applied cold bandages to the poor burning head; but his piteous cry for me still went on. At last the doctor arrived.

"What is it? Is he worse?" I gasped.

"Fever—fever—nothing more," he replied.

After looking at my poor Ben for some time, he took his departure, promising to return the next morning. And so that wretched night passed on.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE morning broke at last. Ben was quieter, and muttered incoherently. Now and then he tossed his head from side to side, and flung off the blanket; then he kept plucking at the sheets. His skin was scalding hot and dry, and his lips black and parched. A burning spot was on each cheek. I sat quietly beside him, waiting till he should open his eyes. He did at last, quite suddenly, and looked steadily forward towards the foot of the bed.

"Who's that man?" he asked.

"There is no one there, dear," I replied.

"Yes, there is." I could not make out whether he knew me or not. "There! there! Who is he?"

"There is no man there, darling; you are dreaming," I said.

"Yes, yes—he *is*! he *is* there! Oh! send him away! Open the door, and drive him out!" he implored. "Tell Winnie to come!"

To satisfy him, I opened the door. "There—he is gone," I said.

Ben's eyes followed the imaginary object across the room, and then rested on me, with a look of vague, helpless inquiry, that went to my heart.

"You know me, Ben?"

"Know me," he echoed, as if he had lost the thread of his ideas.

—"Winnie—your darling Winnie. Don't you know your Winnie?"

"There he is again!" he cried, starting forward in bed. "What is he doing? How big he's growing! Oh! how big! how big! Oh! there's no more room for him! The room can't hold him! It will burst! He's stifling me! he's stifling me!"

Once more I laid the cold bandage on his head, and fanned him. He became a little quieter, and again either dozed, or was insensible.

And the grey morning grew white, then yellow, then rosy pink. The sun was rising. I sat watching, sick with wishing that I knew what to do, longing for the doctor to come.

And so the hours passed away. I grew faint, and chill, and sick, and my hopes waxed dimmer and dimmer, and nearly died out.

At eight o'clock I heard Mrs. Macfarlane stirring, and, soon after, she tapped at the door, and then entered.

"He's still alive, then?" she asked, glancing at the bed.

I did not answer.

"Shall I bring you some breakfast?—a cup of tea?" she asked. "You must try and keep up your strength for what you'll have to go through."

I quietly assented, and she left the room. Presently she returned, with a cup of tea and some toast.

"I know nothing of illness," I said, "but surely he ought to be taking some nourishment?—beef-tea, or something?"

"It's of no use," she said. "I wouldn't tease him. Let him go off quiet. Nothing will do him any good. Perhaps he'd have a fit if you tried to force him to swallow. Besides, you should starve a fever."

When she had left the room I drank a little tea, and compelled myself to swallow the toast. Then Ben opened his eyes, and gazed at me earnestly, but evidently without recognition. I cooled a spoonful of tea, and held it to his lips; and to my delight, he swallowed it. I tried again and again, with equal success. But at last he would take no more; he turned aside, and again closed his eyes.

I moved to a window at the far end of the room, which was a large one, and opened it for a little air. This window was at the back of the house, and looked on to a stone terrace, a few steps from which led down to a desolate looking garden, overshadowed by high trees. Grass and weeds sprung up between the flags, and covered the gravel walks, green with damp; and some neglected rose bushes were mixed up with currants and gooseberries and a few sunflowers. All was wild, tangled, and neglected, and the whole was wretched and desolate to behold.

A peacock came marching along the grass-grown terrace, and, perching himself on a large stone vase, began to plume his gorgeous attire in the sun, which tried to throw a few straggling rays through the sad-looking place.

I felt so worn out, so hopeless and helpless, my heart ached so, that I laid my head upon the window sill, and wept bitterly.

A loud scream from the peacock awoke Ben—if indeed he had been asleep.

"It's Aunt Jem singing 'We praise Thee,'" he cried. "How she screams! It goes through my head like a knife! Ah, there's Pinchley! He's getting up into the pulpit. He's going to preach. How big his sleeves are! No—they are wings. He's going to fly! Stop him Winnie! Stop him! How big he's grown! He's flying! He's coming this way! Let us run! Oh, I can't! I'm chained—chained! There he comes! Stop him! He's the Devil—the dreadful Devil! Look at his horrid claws! Look at his red coals of eyes! He's coming—coming! Oh, save me! Mr. Gascoign—Mr. Gascoign—save me! save me!"

He broke into shrieks, so appalling, that Mrs. Macfarlane came hurrying into the room.

"What's the matter? Is he worse?" she asked, looking very much frightened.

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know!" I cried, wringing my hands in agony. "Send for the doctor, for pity's sake!"

"Poor thing! he can't last much longer!" said Mrs. Macfarlane, placidly regarding my poor little brother, as he lay there, still as death, when he had ceased to scream, and had fallen back on his pillow.

The doctor was not long in coming. When he did come, he gave me no more comfort than Mrs. Macfarlane.

"Can nothing be done?" I implored. "Ought he not to have some nourishment?"

"No use," said Mrs. Macfarlane. "I wouldn't tease him. Let him go off quiet."

"Doctor," I persisted, "oughtn't he to have beef-tea? Don't people have beef-tea when they are ill?"

"On no account," he replied; "we must reduce the fever first—reduce the fever, you know."

"He will die of weakness," I pleaded. "Give him a chance for his life."

"We must first reduce the fever," he reiterated.

And so the day dragged on. Sometimes my darling was so quiet, that I had to bend my ear close to his lips, to know whether he still breathed; then again the fever would return, and he would rave fearfully.

Good, faithful Joe had gone home that morning, to tell his father and uncle what had happened. His father sent him

back in the evening however, thinking I might want him. "For," he said, "she is such a queer woman!"

And so another night drew on, and there was less and less of hope. As I looked my last at the yellow sun, it was with a shuddering sickly feeling, "when I see that sun again, what will have happened? Shall I be alone?—alone, for ever?" I shivered, and laid my face down close to his, and prayed the dear Lord to take away my breath at the same moment as my little Ben's, and to send an angel to lead us both away together to the new world, where we should be safe from parting. I wondered whether I *could* live after seeing Ben die. I thought it was not possible. Then I fell to wondering, whether God was *very* angry with people who took away their own life when it had become a torture to them. And so I went on thinking, with Ben's sweet face close to mine, long after Mrs. Macfarlane had gone to bed.

Towards morning, Ben began to speak. "Winnie! Winnie dear!"

My heart gave a great leap. Had the fever left him?

"Winnie, we'll go home and see dear Father. Dear Father!"

So tenderly pathetic were his tones, that, thinking he was conscious, I answered, "Yes darling, we will."

He went on: "Nurse, why have you given me a hot bottle for my head?"

Then I knew that the fever had not left him.

He went on: "Winnie! Winnie darling! Miss Parsons, ask Father to unlock Winnie's door. I want my Winnie! I can't be happy without her!"

Such a piteous, despairing wail! Poor little darling!

There was a long silence. I thought he slept. Suddenly, he broke into a loud and joyous cry, "Thatcher's, Crown and Anchor! Thatcher's, Crown and Anchor!"

How had I forgotten—how *could* I have forgotten—"Mother's" parting words to Ben: "If I got a letter or a telegraph message, to say you were ill, off I'd go at once—be sure of that, dear!—off I'd go, and nurse you, my lamb!"

CHAPTER XXX.

OH! if the night would go! If the night would go! "Mother" would know all that ought to be done; "Mother" knew all about illness; "Mother" would save him!

Ben was quiet now. The fever seemed less; but I thought his strength was less too. His life was ebbing away. I felt sure he ought to have some nourishment; but I trembled at the idea of infringing the doctor's orders. I was so fearfully ignorant.

At six o'clock I went below, and with my ears strained to catch the slightest sound from above, tapped at the door of the little parlour where Joe slept, in his clothes, on a rug, ready for any summons.

"Dear Joe," I said, "I want you to manage to get me some beef-tea for Ben. Do you think you could?"

"Quite easy, Miss. Granny was a cook when she was young, and she'll know all about it, and make you some. Sick folks always has it when they can afford. Granny can get about to do that, though she can't get out, nor go upstairs, because of her rheumatics."

"Then Joe, I shall want you to show me the way to the railway station; and before that, you will have to go and fetch the doctor. I shall want him to stay here with Ben, while I go to the railway to send off a telegram."

"Yes Miss; I'd best go to Granny's first, and tell her about the beef-tea, and then call for the doctor."

"Don't say anything about it, Joe, to the doctor or Mrs. Macfarlane."

"No fear Miss." And off he went.

Ben was asleep, or appeared to be; but so quiet, and wan, and death-like, that again I bent down in quick alarm, to listen for his breathing. It was fainter now; I could scarcely be sure he breathed at all. The fever seemed to have left him; but it had done its work. He was worn out, and dying of exhaustion.

At about half-past seven Joe returned with the doctor.

"How is he now?" I asked, breathless with anxiety, when the doctor had felt his pulse.

"The usual course. The usual course," he replied, with calm indifference.

"Doctor, he is dying of weakness!" I cried, in my agony, catching hold of his arm. "Oh! give him something to keep him alive! Don't let him slip away, when a little thing might save him! Don't they give wine—brandy?"

"No—I have always been opposed to alcoholic stimulants. Anything of the sort would produce a return of the fever."

"Beef-tea, then?"

"No—too heavy and bilious. A little toast and water—lemonade—weak tea—no animal food of any sort."

"I am going to the station to telegraph," I said.

"No use; no use," he replied.

"Is there *no* hope?" I cried.

"While there is life there is hope, as I said before."

"Is he dying," I gasped, with a strong shudder.

"Yes, going fast now."

"Oh save him! save him!" I implored.

The man only shook his head. I threw on my hat, and, hastily calling Joe, started in a run for the station. Arrived there, I despatched the following telegram to "Mother:"—

"Ben is dying. Come. You promised. He has had fever, and is dying of weakness. The doctor won't let him have wine, or brandy, or anything but weak tea, and toast and water, and lemonade. Come. Answer this directly."

I put my hand into my pocket to feel for my purse, and found it—gone! I must have dropped it on the road, I thought. What was to be done? Joe, however, had a little money in his pocket; so the matter was soon set straight, and we ran back as fast as we could.

We found the doctor discussing some tea and buttered toast, which Mrs. Macfarlane had prepared for him.

"Is he better?" I whispered.

"No, there is no chance of it," he replied.

I felt I could have killed the man, sitting so comfortably there, sucking in his lips over his buttered toast. I hated him; for I felt sure he was an ignorant quack, who had let my brother's precious life slip away, for want of knowing the merest rudiments of his profession. I said, "If you cannot do my brother any good, it is of no use for you to come here any more."

"Just so; just so," he replied, not one bit offended.

Soon after, he took his leave. Then I felt at liberty to do as I pleased.

Joe came in, to say that he had searched for my purse every step of the way to the station, and could not find it. "When did you have it last, Miss?" he asked.

"I don't remember. Oh yes; I had it yesterday afternoon. I took it out of my pocket, because it stuck out, and was hard, and I was afraid it might strike Ben. I put it on the table here."

"You'd better look after it Miss," said Joe. "She's a queer woman!" he added, dropping his voice, and pointing vaguely with his thumb over his shoulder.

"Never mind. It must be here somewhere. It will turn up," I carelessly replied.

Joe only shook his head, but said nothing, and left the room.

I sat beside my little brother, gazing with unspeakable yearning upon his wan face. Dying? No hope? I felt stunned, bewildered, rather than grief-stricken; I was past that. I seemed, not myself, not in the same world, never to have been myself at all. The past was like a dream—all the dear, bright, beautiful past. It seemed such a long, long time, since I had seen him struck down in the field beside the pond.

I tried to remember what he had once been like; but it seemed so long ago—so unreal. I could better remember Aunt Jemima and Mr. Pinchley, and disagreeable or every-day persons and things. But in thinking of them, I gradually recalled the picture of a bright-eyed, sunny-haired child, with a laughing, cherub face, and all sweet, and pure, and winning ways, and a voice that, to me, used to sound like the rippling of a clear stream; and with a heart, guileless, and full of gentleness and love,—aye, brimming over with love for me. And so, thinking of all this, my icy hardness melted, and I wept.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DOUBLE knock on the street door. A telegram from "Mother!"

"I'm a coming. Give him brandy. Be sure you do. Don't you be put off it. And beef-tea."

Oh the relief—almost the joy—this message brought me! I bent my lips close down to Ben's ear, and said, "Ben 'Mother's' coming!" I could not help it. But he never heard; or, if he did, he was too far gone to make any sign. I rang the bell twice running, as a signal for Joe to come.

"Joe," I said, "I want a bottle of the very best brandy you can get; and the beef-tea, if it is ready."

"Perhaps the beef-tea will be ready Miss," answered Joe; "and Mrs. Macfarlane may have some brandy in the house."

But when that person was asked if she had any, she indignantly scouted the notion, and frostily informed me that she was a teatotaller.

"You are not going to give that dying creature brandy?" she asked. "You won't send him drunk into the presence of his Maker?"

"I am going to give him brandy, and nothing shall prevent me. Joe, you go and fetch me a bottle. Oh! that reminds me! Where is my purse? Have you seen my purse, Mrs. Macfarlane?"

"No, I didn't know you had one," she replied.

That was not true. She had seen me turn my money into my purse—Ben's and mine, by the way—the day we arrived.

"Where *can* it be?" I continued, searching about everywhere.

"Do you want anything more?" demanded Mrs. Macfarlane, rather impatiently, I thought.

"Nothing, thank you," I replied.

As soon as she was gone, Joe said, "Granny will give me the money to get the brandy, Miss."

"Thank you, Joe. Then get it quickly," I replied. "I shall have found my purse by the time you come back."

"I don't believe as you'll find it, Miss. It's not the first time money has been lost in this house. Oh! she's a queer woman!"

By which I knew, that he considered Mrs. Macfarlane a thief.

This was a dreadful thought. What could I do without money? Ben's life might hang upon my having a pound or two in my pocket. Ben's life? Ah me! How could I go on deceiving myself?

A little tap at the door. In came Mrs. Macfarlane, hard, unsympathetic, a little defiant. Her eyes looked smaller, her nose sharper, her lips thinner, her cheek bones higher than they had seemed before, as she said,—"Have you found your purse?"

"No, you know I have not," was my unguarded reply.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Do not trouble me. Wait till it is over," I replied, glancing towards the bed.

"Why should I wait? Why should I have a death in the house, and perhaps an inquest? You ought to have taken him to the infirmary, or the workhouse. You had no business to come here, and not be able to pay."

"But I *was* able to pay, till I lost my purse; and I *shall* pay. Our father will pay every farthing."

"How do I know that?"

"Because I say it! *I*, Winnie Travers!"

I couldn't help it. I had risen suddenly, and now looked and spoke as I had never done in my life before. Trouble had matured me. I was no longer a child.

The woman stood irresolute, then left the room.

I was dreadfully perplexed. What *should* I do for money? Suppose I wanted something which would do Ben good, and have no money to pay for it?

But Mrs. Thatcher was coming.

She knew me! *She* would trust me! Yes—but how soon would she come? Certainly, not to-day.

Then I fell to thinking of the happy time we had had with her so long ago;—long? nay, very little, in time, but ages, in suffering! I thought over all her wonderful kindness to us, up to the very last moment, when, as we had shot into the tunnel, we had seen her running after the train as if she thought she could stop it, and get us back.

Then it came into my mind, how we had begun to do our accounts, and had found—oh! why had I forgotten it?—the money she had returned us, and which I had sewn up in my jacket lining! And there I found it,—"Mother's nest egg!"

Just then, in came Mrs. Macfarlane, insolent, prepared to bully. "I've been thinking," she began, "that it will be more satisfactory to all parties, if you either turn out at once,

or else gives me a written document, stating that no blame is due to me, for the loss of your purse."

"I shall do neither, Mrs. Macfarlane."

"Oh, you won't?"

"And, Mrs. Macfarlane, I find all my money was not in the missing purse. I had some more about me, but had forgotten it." And thereupon I showed her the "nest egg."

Mrs. Macfarlane began to mumble an apology; but, just then, Joe returned, with a jug of beef-tea, and a bottle of brandy; and she left the room.

At that moment, looking at Ben, I saw him open his eyes a little; and then the lids drooped over them again. There was an ashen hue upon his face; his lips were blue. I thought of Grace; he looked so like her.

"Can this be death," I gasped, catching Joe's hand.

He turned aside, and made no answer, but drew the back of his hand quickly across his eyes.

"Give him brandy, quick!" he said.

My hand trembled so, that I could do nothing; but Joe dropped a little brandy into a spoonful of warm beef-tea, gently slid his arm under the pillow, and, lifting it with Ben on it, said, "Now, Miss, a drop or two at a time. He's dying of weakness, Granny says, and not of the fever."

It was difficult work; but gradually we got the tip of the spoon between his teeth, and very slowly dropped the contents down his throat. He could swallow! One spoonful, then another, and he tried to turn his head aside.

"Stop Miss—no more now," whispered Joe, gently laying the little form down again.

"Have you ever seen this done before Joe?" I asked, struck with his tender, quiet, managing ways.

"Yes Miss. I had a little sister, who died of decline two years ago. They fed her; and I did, like this, at the last."

"At the last? Oh Joe! Then do you think Ben will die?"

Joe hung his head.

"Do answer me, Joe!"

"Granny says, if he can take food he may get well yet; but they've let him get too low. Granny says, more folks dies of the weakness, than the fever. And she says he ought to have had a *real* doctor."

"A real doctor? Is not this one a *real* doctor, Joe?"

"I don't know, Miss. He has a little shop. The poor people goes to him, Granny says, but none of the quality."

I turned round, and gazed hopelessly on my darling. Oh! to think he might have been saved, if I had known more!

And so another day came to an end, and night crept over us again.

Mrs. Macfarlane came in as usual, before going to bed, and looked at Ben.

"It's wonderful, how he lasts," she said; "but its the Lord's will he should go off slow. He'll be gone before the morning, 'specially as you've been giving him brandy."

"It is a pity he did not have brandy and beef-tea sooner," I said. "He might have been stronger now."

"Ah! well, well! And to think of your having had the window open to-day!" she added.

"I wish I had given him more fresh air," I sighed.

"How much beef-tea with brandy in it, has he had to-day?" she asked.

"As much as I could get him to take," I replied.

"Yet he's going fast."

"I know it; but he would have been gone already without it."

"Ah, well! well!" And off she went to bed.

Then I resumed my lonely watch, feeling that it was the last. Life was all but gone; so little was there left, that I could hardly see him breathe at all. The little white form lay there, as near death as possible.

This night a great dread was on me, that I might fall off to sleep, and wake to find that he had left me. What, if he should wake to consciousness for a moment, and speak but one word, and I not be awake to hear it? the one precious word that was to last me for the rest of my life! It was too horrible to think of. My brain was reeling for want of sleep. How could I resist the dreadful torpor that was gradually but effectually mastering me? Oh, surely I could, for one night more!—only one night! I plunged my face and hands into cold water, and saturated my head with it. Then I felt more wakeful; but, as the night wore on, there was a buzzing in my head, and I seemed to see everything through a sort of mist, as in a dream, and I could not think clearly. Once or twice, I had to struggle to remember who was lying there, sometimes fancying it was Grace, and forgetting all about Ben's illness. Then I again bathed my head with cold water, and tried to remember where I was, and what had happened. And thus I kept awake.

That night I had arranged for Joe to be in the kitchen, and

keep up the fire for warming the beef-tea. The good faithful fellow must have kept awake all night, for he never failed to bring the tea at the proper intervals. This also helped to keep me awake. Sometimes Ben muttered, and moved his head uneasily, and I feared the fever was returning; but he always grew quiet again.

The next morning dawned—broke, and still my darling lingered on; but there was a blue, pinched look upon his face now. Perhaps it was caused by the cold grey morning light. Still I struggled against the sort of dazed, misty feeling that was gradually getting the better of me; but I felt less and less able to resist it. All through the night, it had seemed to me, that strange sentences, printed in letters of fire, had been dancing about in the air, now advancing, now receding, anon dilating, and again contracting. I had felt an urgent desire to read them and make out their sense; but I never could. And it was such a dreadful strain, to remember that I was awake, and not in a dream, and that life or death might depend upon my keeping awake.

At last I had felt desperate, and opening the window at the other end of the room, leant out. The fresh air revived me. In a few moments I re-closed it, and returned to Ben.

But now, the day had broken. Ben had that same death-like look. I mixed a little brandy with water in a spoon, and gently raising his head, let it trickle down his throat. He moaned faintly, and feebly turned aside his head. Again I applied the spoon to his lips. He half opened his eyes, and they met mine, with—surely, surely, with recognition!

Could it be? Could it be? But the eyes, hardly opened, re-closed, and there was no more sign of life.

Six, seven, eight o'clock.

Mrs. Macfarlane came into the room with a cup of tea. I drank it eagerly.

"Not gone yet?" she exclaimed, as though disappointed. "Well! well! How he lasts!"

I think I should then have turned upon her, and driven her from the room; but there was a sound of wheels—nearer! nearer! A carriage stopped at the gate. The bell was rung very gently. In another minute, "Mother" was in the room.

She took one step forward; then stopped doubtfully at sight of me. I cried out, "Mother! Mother!" and the next moment, she had caught me in her arms, and I was sobbing on her breast.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"WELL, I'm sure! Who's this?" from Mrs. Macfarlane, in hard, shrill tones. She had followed "Mother" into the room, and had witnessed the meeting.

I raised my head, and saw "Mother's" look of utter astonishment, as her eyes rested on Mrs. Macfarlane. She took no further notice, however, but at once went to the bedside, and gazed upon Ben. I saw that she clasped her hands tightly together, and that her whole face worked painfully.

"My dear little man!" she sighed.

"Then these are your children, are they?" pursued Mrs. Macfarlane. "A fine story that girl's been telling me, about her rich father, who's going to pay me ever so much! As if anything could have paid one, for having a death in the house! —and now"——

"I'll tell you what," broke in Mrs. Thatcher, "you'd better leave the room. Till this young lady has been here a full week, she doesn't owe you any rent. Time enough then, to talk about who she is."

"Why, didn't I hear her call you 'Mother,' with my very own ears?" snapped Mrs. Macfarlane.

"Of course! Why not? Many call me by that name—country fashion; but I'm not her mother, for all that. They are gentlefolks, born and bred. I am only a poor working woman, like yourself."

"Then, what have you come here for?"

"That's my business. Now, you just go along with you out of this room, this very minute! If not, there's those on the road that'll make you, that's all!"

For a moment, she stood irresolute. Then she departed, saying, "I shan't wait upon you, mind!"

"So much the better," rejoined Mrs. Thatcher.

Then she took off her bonnet and shawl, laid them neatly aside, and, drawing from a bundle a clean white apron, put it on, and, sitting down beside Ben, examined him closely.

"How much beef-tea and brandy has he had?" she asked.

I told her.

"Not near enough, dear! Give me the beef-tea."

"Joe is warming it on the kitchen fire," I replied. "Oh, here he comes with it."

"Ah, that's right, young man," said "Mother," as Joe came in. She tasted the beef-tea. "Whoever made this, know's what she's about," she added.

"Granny made it," said Joe.

"Then, will you ask 'Granny' to please make some more, if this is all that's left, young man."

"That is more than will last him till to-morrow morning," I said.

"No, dear; he must take it all, in less than three hours, if he is to live," replied "Mother."

Then she added the brandy; more than I should have given in a whole day.

"Oh! take care!" I cried. "Won't it choke him?"

"No fear," she replied.

"Won't it bring back the fever?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Ought he to have had beef-tea and brandy, all through his fever, when he was so dreadfully hot?"

"Beef-tea, dear, but not brandy, then. But a doctor would have given him medicines to open the pores, and allay the fever. Only, his strength ought to have been kept up by some nourishment."

I sighed. How little I knew!

As though he divined what she wanted, Joe gently slipped his arm under the pillow, and raised my darling, while "Mother" slowly dropped the beef-tea down his throat. After that, she watched him, as if her life depended upon what was to happen next. Ben sank down again, with a faint moan.

"Is he in much pain, 'Mother?'" I asked.

"No pain at all, my dear. That is only weakness. See! the brandy is telling upon him already."

Watching keenly, I could see the very faintest hue of pink, steal into his cheeks and lips.

"That is not the fever returning?" I asked.

"No dear, it won't return," she replied, looking very, very sad.

"Mother, dear—give me a little hope—only a little!" I pleaded.

"Poor child!" she murmured, drawing my head to her shoulder.

"Do say you think he *may* recover," I entreated in my agony.

"He's gone so low. I never saw anyone so low, and recover," she replied. "We shall hear what the doctor says, by and bye."

"Oh! don't have him, 'Mother!' He has killed my Ben, through letting him get too low!" I cried.

"I mean, you own family's doctor, my dear. Oh! I forgot to tell you, that when your telegraph message came, I started at once for the station; but there was no train going for three hours, and no special to be had. So I went to the parson (Mr. Gascoign—you remember, dear?) and asked him to telegraph off to his cousin, who knows your family."——

"Mr. Gascoign?—Yes, Mother."—

—"To tell them where you are, and that the poor little dear was dying, and to bid them come at once, and bring the doctor."

"Oh! how kind of you! How splendid!" I exclaimed. "Dr. Gillias might save him yet! and perhaps the sound of dear Father's voice might rouse him. But they won't come —I know they won't—till too late!"

"Perhaps they'll take a special," suggested "Mother." "But tell me, now,—how did he catch the fever?"

So then I told her of all the terrible things that had happened since we had left dear, quiet Kimberton.

"That's a dear, brave lad, that Joe," said Mrs. Thatcher. "Your Pa will think nothing too good to be done for him."

"No indeed," I sighed.

"And you, my poor child—why, I hardly knew you at first! You are that changed. You look as if you hadn't slept for nights. What sort of a bed have you got?"

"Bed? Oh, I haven't wanted one. I have sat in this chair all these nights—I forget how many."

"Did you sleep?"

"I have not even shut my eyes, except just a little the first night. How could I?"

"Aren't you sleepy?"

"Not now. I was."

"And what have you eaten?"

"I don't know. Bread—toast. I couldn't eat."

She gazed anxiously upon me, and said, "No wonder you look as you do!"

Then she again gazed earnestly on Ben.

He was looking as white as a sheet. "Mother" took up the brandy in quick alarm.

"How long has he looked like this?" she asked.

"Oh! by degrees. It has come on gradually," I replied.

Again he was gently lifted, and swallowed about two spoonsful of the beef-tea and brandy.

"Do you think him worse?" I asked, bitterly disappointed; for I had began to hope a little.

"I don't know, dear. I wish they would come," she said, turning to the open window, and listening. Presently Joe came in.

"There's no train due for three hours and a half," said he.

She shook her head very sadly.

I said, "Do you think they will not come—in—" My voice shook so, I could not finish.

"In time, dear? God knows! *His* time is always the best. Try and feel that, dear!"

"I can't! Oh, I can't!"

"*Try* to, dear. He loves little Ben; and if He sees the dear lamb would not be happy staying here, He will take him away. It won't be long to wait, poor little thing! You'll soon follow him."

"You think he is too weak to recover?" I cried.

"I'm afraid," she slowly answered.

"But you won't give him up? You'll go on trying to rally him?"

"Yes, till the very last minute," she replied, with emphasis. "But, my dear, try and bring yourself to submit, if it is the will of God. Try and bring yourself."

"No!" I cried, in my desperate agony. "No! if He takes Ben away I will never pray to Him again! I will never believe in Him! I didn't ask to be born! I didn't ask to have Ben given me to love! God made me live, whether I liked it or not; and He gave me Ben, and made me love him; and now, He would undo all He did without consulting me! If He can do it, He must be a cruel monster! And it would *not* be good for Ben! he would not be happy, even in heaven, without me! If he dies, I will pray to the Devil! I won't pray to God any more!"

"Oh! hush, dear, hush! That would be foolish. If you did that, you could never meet Ben again. You could never

follow to where he will be gone. Suppose God was to take you at your word?"

I fell on my knees, and prayed the dear Lord to forgive my mad wickedness, and to spare my Ben to me; not to punish me as I deserved.

Again a faint pink slightly suffused my darling's face. He looked a little better. "Mother" saw it, and smiled.

"It is the beef-tea and the brandy," she whispered. "I wish I dare give him more brandy; but I'm afraid, without the doctor. Oh! if he would come!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONLY one hour had passed away, of the three-and-a-half that Joe had said we must wait, when we heard the sound of a carriage thundering along the road, and the hard galloping of horses' hoofs. It came near—nearer; tore up to the gate, and stopped.

"They've come by special!" cried "Mother."

Dr. Gillias dashed out of the carriage, just as I, who had flown down stairs, had opened the house door.

"Is he alive?" he cried.

I had scarcely answered "Yes," when, not knowing me, he pushed me aside, and went up-stairs, two steps at a time.

I looked for Father to come out of the coach. He was not there; but in his stead was—Miss Gascoign! She was just passing me, on her way up-stairs, when I caught her hand.

"Oh, Miss Gascoign, won't you speak to me?" I timidly cried. I feared she was too angry, too disgusted with me, even to speak; but the next moment, after one quick glance at my altered face, she had caught me in her arms.

"My poor little Winnie!"

I clung round her neck. When had I felt such comfort? I hung upon her, as we mounted the stairs together; and when we entered the sick room, her sweet and gracious presence seemed to flood it with its own peaceful blessedness. Dr. Gillias stood, watch in hand, feeling Ben's pulse. Then he examined his lips, raised his eye-lids.

Mrs. Thatcher had risen when Miss Gascoign entered, and now stood before the window, looking so nice, and clean, and homely, in her good dark lilac print, and white apron.

Dr. Gillias laid down the little wasted hand, and, recognizing me, said, "Oh! was it you, little Winnie, on the stairs? I didn't know you. Have you had the fever too?"

"No, I am quite well," I answered. "But tell me about Ben, Dr. Gillias."

"Who's that woman?" he interrupted. "Is she the nurse?" And, without waiting for an answer, he walked to the window. I followed, to hear what he would say about Ben. "What have you been about, to let him get so low?" he asked, addressing Mrs. Thatcher. "You should have

given him nourishment—beef-tea, and so on, all through the fever, and brandy later, and champagne."

"He has had it, sir," she replied, "but not in time, I'm afraid."

"Has he had no doctor?" he asked.

"Not a *real* doctor," I replied; "only an ignorant druggist." And then I related to him the cause of Ben's illness, and how we had come to this house; how Mrs. Macfarlane had sent for her so-called doctor, who had forbidden nourishment and stimulant; how I had dismissed him, and had acted on my own responsibility, till Mrs. Thatcher's arrival.

"Bravo! little Winnie!" exclaimed the doctor, patting me on the head. "A brave, wise little woman! If you hadn't given him what you did, he would have been dead before this!"

"But I didn't give him enough, Doctor; I was afraid. Mrs. Thatcher gave him four times as much."

"Bravo! Mrs. Thatcher!" he cried, clapping her vigorously on the shoulder. "Come now, let's give him some more."

But when she dropped in what she had been accustomed to give, he took the bottle from her, and added as much again.

"That will do," he said, "for the present. I suppose there is a good chemist's shop in the town, where I can get a prescription made up? I must find out by and bye."

"Mother" was delighted at the increased measure of stimulant the doctor had administered to Ben. "I'm so glad, sir!" she said. "I dared not do it myself; and the time has never seemed to pass so slow in all my life, as while I was waiting for you to come."

"Now my little man," said Dr. Gillias, lifting Ben as he spoke. And almost before we could notice, the contents of the spoon had been swallowed.

"Now for another," continued the doctor; and then he laid Ben down on the pillow, and sat down to watch him.

"Why—why! What's this? He's been leeched!" he exclaimed.

"The doctor did it," I said.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated.

We were all silent. In a little while I asked, "Was it wrong?"

"Is murder wrong! It's a miracle the boy lives! The fool! The ass! He ought to be hanged—shot—drowned—flayed alive!"

The doctor's wrath was all the greater, in that he could not vent it aloud, for fear of disturbing his patient.

"Will Ben recover?" I asked.

"He's as low as he can possibly be," was the reply. "If he dies, that fellow has murdered him!"

There was a tap at the door; and in came Mrs. Macfarlane, in a clean cap, and dropping deep curtseys. Instead of going up to Dr. Gillias, she beckoned him mysteriously to the window. He went there, accompanied by me. Mrs. Macfarlane placed a chair for him, and then stood before him, her arms crossed, her mouth primmed up into an attempted expression of sympathy that was a most signal failure.

"*Another* woman!" exclaimed the doctor. "Who is she, Winnie?" I saw that he did not like her.

An angry gleam appeared for a moment in Mrs. Macfarlane's cold grey eyes; but she quickly subdued her feelings, and answered,—

"Not a *woman* at all, my dear gentleman. Not in the least, Sir."

"Well, well, Mrs. Landlady—or whatever you want to be called—what the devil do you want with me?"

"Oh, my poor, dear gentleman, since it's the Lord's will that you should lose your sweet little son"——

"Why, who do you take me for? I'm the doctor."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, sir; no offence meant. I thought you were his papa, my good gentleman. But I was going to say, didn't the poor dear young gentleman ought to have a clergyman?"

"A *what?*"

"Shall I send for the clergyman, sir?"

"Send for the devil!" hissed the exasperated doctor, rising, and crossing the room to where Miss Gascoign sat, gazing upon Ben with her angel's face, so full of pure and pitying tenderness. She passed her arm around me, and drew me down to the floor beside her. Then she gently laid my head against her knee, and made me close my eyes.

Mrs. Macfarlane, scared, left the room. Dear good "mother" was following her. I looked up quickly.

"Mother!" I said. My conscience smote me, for having forgotten her.

Miss Gascoign looked down upon my up-turned face, with a bright, quick flash in her eyes, and exclaimed, "Winnie!"

Then she caught me in her arms, and kissed me. I fancied that she thought I had the fever; so I answered, "No, I havn't the fever, dear Miss Gascoign. It's only poor 'Mother,' that I was speaking to."

"Who is 'Mother?'" she asked, rather coldly.

"Come here, 'Mother,'" I whispered, beckoning to poor bewildered Mrs. Thatcher; and I added, to Miss Gascoign, "The best friend I have—except *you*."

Her only answer was to draw me closer to her.

"'Mother' dear," I said, "Miss Gascoign wants to know who you are."

"I'm Thatcher's, Crown and Anchor, Kimberton, at your service, ma'am," she promptly replied, dropping a deep curtsey, and then leaving the room, "to keep company with poor little Joe in the parlour," she said. "The boy was moping for want of company."

Though I had been half crazed for want of sleep, before, I could not sleep now. Millions of thoughts were coursing through my brain, and keeping me awake. The same buzzing was going on in my head; the same fiery sentences filled the air. But, through all this, one thought troubled me—one question had to be asked,—and it kept me awake; yet I lacked courage to ask it. Where was Father?

The good "Mother" waited on us untiringly. For Miss Gascoign, she served a nice little dinner, cooked by herself; and they made me eat, and forced me to drink some wine. Dr. Gillias had been pioneered to an inn, by Joe, with whom he had struck up a grand friendship.

Evening came. Twilight began. Night fell. The last bird had twittered; the moon rose; the stars appeared, one by one.

Still Miss Gascoign continued her patient watch; still my darling gave no sign of strength. Dr. Gillias came in every hour, and administered something out of a small phial, and between whiles gave him a spoonful of turtle soup and brandy.

"How is he now?" whispered Miss Gascoign.

"Asleep, at last," said the doctor.

"Is that a good sign?" she asked.

"Certainly," he replied.

"Is he better?" she pursued.

"A few hours will decide all, now," he answered.

"How many?"

"Five or six, perhaps."

"Do you hope?"

"Scarcely."

They thought I was asleep, but I was not; yet, though I heard what they said, it was all a sort of hazy dream to me, just like the voices one hears in one's dreams. It was dreadful —horrible. It was life, or death; yet I could not rouse myself.

I don't know what o'clock it was then, but I fell asleep at last, and must have slept for hours, resting against Miss Gascoign's knee. Suddenly, I awoke; as suddenly, as though a cannon ball had burst into the room.

It seemed to me that I had slept but for a moment; yet all was changed.

I was standing, held up by "Mother." Ben was sitting up in bed, leaning against Miss Gascoign. Dr. Gillias stood by.

Was it a dream? Was I in my senses? Ben's eyes were open. His lips moved. He uttered one word!

"Winnie!"

I sprang forward. Our eyes met. Then his head fell back on the pillow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHERE was I? All was dark, and silent as the grave. Was I in the world still?

No, this must be hell! I had said I would worship the devil if my Ben were taken from me—I remembered that! And so, my punishment would be, to live without him for ever, and ever, and ever! Yes, this was hell indeed! Never again to see my heart's desire! Never again to hear his sweet voice! Never, never again! I groaned in my great anguish.

There was a slight sound near me. I uttered a faint cry of terror. Silence followed.

I listened, and listened. There was no further sound. Keeping quiet, sleep again fell upon me, and strange visions came and went. No longer did sentences of fire dance before my eyes; but I dimly heard spoken words, in different voices, sometimes of people I had known, sometimes in my own voice. Miss Gascoign's seemed to say, "He is not dead; he is asleep." And I thought she misquoted the text; and I struggled and strove to set it right; till at last I heard my own voice saying, "He is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn." Then all the voices seemed to die away; and thought ceased for awhile.

And then, a most sweet vision fell upon me.

I was dead; and Ben and I were being carried by angels up to heaven. He was speaking to me in soft faint tones.

"Winnie! Winnie darling!"

Yes, God had pardoned me! The good Lord had pleaded for me! I was forgiven! I should live for ever and ever with my little Ben! Yes, this was heaven!

My tears welled over, and dimmed my sight; but I saw my darling, upborne by angels, floating on a soft blue cloud. The face of one of the angels was like Miss Gascoign's face. Was she dead too?

But the vision faded, and began to recede. I tried to stretch out my arms, tried to follow my little brother, but I could not; and again I was in darkness.

When next I woke, I knew that I was yet living upon this

earth. I was in a strange room. Miss Gascoign was bending over me.

"Are you better, darling?" she asked.

I turned away. I hated life. I loathed the light.

"Come Winnie, it is all over now, dear, and you must try and forget it," she said.

"To forget! To forget Ben!" I cried, while the scalding tears poured between my fingers, "Go away! Leave me! Don't talk to me! Oh, Ben! Ben!"

"But he is much better," replied Miss Gascoign.

"Better, dead? Yes," I said; "better for *him;* but—for *me!* for me! what have I done—I, a poor ignorant child—that God should torture me like this?"

"Winnie! you don't think Ben is *dead?* He did not die. He was so weak, that the mere effort to speak to you made him faint off, or else fall asleep again—we were not sure which it was at the moment. I said to you, 'He is not dead; he is asleep.' He is rallying fast now."

"Don't mock me!" I bitterly cried. "You can't deceive me! I saw his spirit—in a vision—here, here, close to me, in the arms of an angel, floating on a blue cloud. Oh, to see him again! *Will* he come again? *Will* he come?"

"Look into my face, Winnie. Have I ever deceived you? I would not do it. I am telling you the solemn truth. Ben is alive, rallying fast; and you shall see him directly you are calm enough."

I seized her wrists. I gazed in an agony of hope into her face. I saw that she spoke the truth. I fell back fainting on the pillow, for I was very, very weak.

Oh! the re-awakening! To find myself lying on a sofa, close beside my darling's bed! To feel his little hand clasping mine! To hear his sweet childish voice once more!

"Don't cry, Winnie darling!" so faint—so low; but still the same sweet plaintive voice. I could only gaze upon him in silent rapture. Was ever happiness like mine?

The hours passed away, and no one spoke or stirred, save when the doctor or Miss Gascoign gave Ben (and me too!) nourishment or medicine.

That happy, quiet evening sped away, and night closed around us.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"BUT I can't understand the angels, and the blue cloud," I said.

"Can't you, dear? It is very simple. *I* was the angel, and I wore my blue dressing-gown. That was the blue cloud."

"Then I really saw Ben?"

"Yes, he had taken it into his head, poor little fellow, that you were dead; so, to pacify him, we carried him into your room for a minute. He went to sleep quietly after that."

"Where was I, when it was so dark?"

"In the room the doctor carried you to, when you became insensible. Acute anxiety and want of sleep had so acted upon your brain, that he said you must be kept in a darkened room. There was a small light there, but it was shaded. Besides, you kept your eyes shut.

"Who was sitting by me then?"

"I."

"But how was it, I could see Ben, when you brought him in?"

"You opened your eyes. Then a little more light was allowed for the few minutes that he was there, to enable him to see you. After that, the light was extinguished altogether."

There was silence for awhile. Then I spoke, faintly and reluctantly.

"I so want to know—and yet—and yet—I am afraid—"

"Tell me, darling."

"Father.—Why didn't he come? Is he too angry? Will he *never* forgive our running away?"

"He does not even know it."

"He does *not?*" I exclaimed.

"No, he has been ill; and it was not thought prudent to tell him!"

"Our dear father! Poor Father! Did he get 'Mother's' telegram?"

"No, it was kept from him."

"By that—that *person*, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Is she kind to him?"

"I think so."

"Does she love him?"

"I am sure of it."

I sighed.

"Is she a great fierce thing, with a big nose?"

"No."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes."

"Do you like her?"

"I suppose so."

"Is dear Father fond of her?"

"Of course."

Another sigh on my part.

"Why are you so determined not to like her, Winnie?"

"I don't know. Ben and I have always hated her. We always call her 'that ogre of a woman,' you know, or some such name."

"Indeed!"

"To think of *you* taking her part!" I exclaimed, feeling, and looking, rather piqued.

"I am not taking her part, dear. Only, I can't see what harm she has done."

"Not see? Oh! Miss Gascoign, dear! Come, now! Hasn't she come between us and our darling father? What more *could* she have done?"

"But, if she was fond of him?"

"I can't think she was!"

"Why not, dear? Is he so *very* unlovable?"

"Why, no; anyone might love Father. They couldn't help it."

"Then, may *she* not love him?"

"Perhaps." This was said very reluctantly.

"Then, why do you set yourselves against her?"

"We think," replied Ben, in faint tones, from his sofa in the window, "that she is not good enough for Father. No one would have been—except you!"

"Yes, that is it," I said. "We don't think *anyone* would have been good enough for Father—except you, of course."

"If it had been me, Winnie dear, it would have been just the same," said Miss Gascoign.

"No, it wouldn't," said I.

"No, it wouldn't," echoed Ben.

"But my brother told me you would never give your consent to your father's marriage with *anyone;* not even if it were me!"

"Oh yes! because I knew it *wasn't* you! I wanted to put it very strong, you know!"

"Ah!" sighed Ben; "what a pity it wasn't you! How nice it would have been!"

"Just what we were saying that day at Cellings—wasn't it, Ben?"

"Yes; we were longing so, to have you with us; and we so wished Father had married you, so that you might not go away on those long, long visits, and we should always have you in the house. And that ogre of a woman has spoilt it all; because, you can't marry Papa now. Ah!" I sighed, longingly.

"Ah!" sighed Ben.

She turned away for a moment. Then, with a bright flush upon her face, and a glad light in her eyes, she said,—

"Children, *I* am that 'ogre of a woman!'"

A cry of delight broke simultaneously from both of us; but I checked myself.

"Oh! you are not joking? You wouldn't be so unkind? Would you, dear Miss Gascoign?"

"It is too good to believe!" said Ben.

"It is true," she said, with quiet emphasis.

"If we had but known!" I sighed.

"Yes—if we had but known!" said Ben, who, more than ever, echoed my every word.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" I lamented; "to think of our having called you 'an ogre of a woman!' Will you forgive us? We didn't mean it."

"It was the other person we meant; not you!" pleaded Ben.

"Yes dear," she laughed; "'the great fierce woman with a big nose.'"

"Oh! I'm so sorry!" I said.

"Does Father know you are here?" asked Ben.

"No, darling; he thinks you are both at school; that you are ill, and that I am there, nursing you."

"The darling father!" I sighed.

"Then, he was not well enough to come? Has he been *very* ill?" asked Ben.

"Very," she sadly replied.

"What has been the matter?"

"We were in that fearful railway accident——"

"What accident?" I interrupted.

"I thought you must have heard of it. Many were killed; but your father escaped, with a broken arm, and severe internal bruises. I was unhurt, and was able to nurse him through the worst."

This was horrible to listen to. "How long ago?" we asked.

"About a fortnight after you left home," she answered.

"And we have been away more than two months," I said. "Oh! to think how happy we were at the Crown and Anchor, while our dear father was suffering so!"

"Fortunately, it occurred close to home; so we were able to have him carried there," pursued Miss Gascoign.

"Close to home? How was that?" I asked.

"So long as your Aunt Jemima was there, nurse could not raise the alarm. Jemima said you were sure to come back very soon; and she forbade nurse to disturb us by letting us know of your disappearance; but directly Aunt Jemima was married and off, poor nurse telegraphed to us to come back, as we were wanted at home."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Your father was frantic. He at once said, 'Something has happened to the children!' And nothing would do, but travelling day and night to get home."

"Then it is all my doing!" I cried, in bitter remorse. "But for our running away, Father would have been somewhere else, and not in the railway accident!"

"Yes, that is true, Winnie," she sadly replied.

"Will he recover? Will he get *quite* well?" we anxiously demanded.

"The doctor thinks so."

"But won't anyone have told him we ran away?" I asked.

"No one knows it, except Dr. Gillias and my brother. They were away when you disappeared."

"But, the servants?"

"The whole set had gone, you know; and the others, having missed the train, did not arrive till the next day. Of course they suppose you are at school."

"And Miss Parsons?"

"She is still with her mother."

"Then no one knows?"

"No one, dear."

"I am glad of that. Poor Father would have thought it such a disgrace."

"He would, indeed."

"But Father must be told," I pursued.

"Not just yet, Winnie dear. Not till he is able to bear it."

After a long silence, I asked, "Why didn't you—why didn't Father—say *you* were the—the——"

"The 'ogre of a woman,' dear? Ah! there I blame myself! I have all my life been lamentably wanting in promptitude, and energy of purpose, in the courage to say 'yes' or 'no,' when pain to myself or others was likely to result. It was clearly my duty, either decidedly to refuse to marry your father, or to tell you frankly that I meant to marry him. But I thought your dislike to your papa's marriage was so insuperable, that it would extend to me, even though I might not marry him, if you knew that he had ever contemplated making me his wife. And then I pictured to myself, how dreadfully painful it would be, to be living at the Rectory, so close to you, and yet not friends. But I meant to write to you before we returned home, and to tell you that it was I, whom he had married."

"Oh! why didn't you? Why?"

"My besetting faults, timidity and irresolution, prevented my writing till too late. It has been a lesson that will last me my life!"

This conversation took place about a fortnight later than the events of the last chapter. During that time, Ben had been rapidly progressing towards convalescence.

There was now a long silence, broken at last by the sound of angry voices from below, those of the doctor and the landlady. The doctor's was the loudest.

"I tell you, No!" from him.

"And I tell you, Yes!" from Mrs. Macfarlane.

"Woman!"

"No more a 'woman' than you are! You mean, paltry, pill-boxing, meddling——"

Mrs. Macfarlane's voice suddenly collapsed; and, stepping on to the landing, I saw Dr. Gillias in the act of taking her by what is vulgarly called "the scruff of the neck," and handing her down the kitchen stairs.

It was war to the knife between the two. The doctor steadily resisted her attempts at thieving and extortion; hence, her first efforts at civility soon ceased, and as she found she was not to look to him for payment of her bill, she held no terms with him, and was often grossly insolent. This was the first day, however, they had so far raised their voices, that we could hear them from above; but, Ben being now thoroughly out of danger, the doctor knew that it would not disturb him.

We thought Mrs. Macfarlane was quelled; but no such thing. Hardly had her adversary joined us, than she followed, and then and there poured fourth the vials of her wrath. Mrs. Thatcher, hearing the hubbub, came to the rescue. No doubt Joe would have followed in the wake, had he been there, but he was not; for, now that his services were no longer needed, he had gone back to his father and uncle, very much cheered by the fact, that Dr. Gillias had done his granny "a power of good," and that "little Master" was out of danger; also, by the promise that our father would provide for granny in comfort all her days, and that he—Joe—was to try and think of some great thing that Papa could do for him, and to let us know as soon as possible.

"A mean, bullying, old pill-box! that's what *you* are!" screamed the fury, white with passion. "Go and poison yourself with your nasty black draughts and boluses! Do!"

"Female!" began the doctor.

"No more a 'female' than you are! You great murdering ruffian!—There!"

"But what is it all about?" I asked; for our mother began to look frightened.

"'About' indeed! A pretty how-d'-you-do! This fellow here, has been saying I stole your purse! Me, an honest woman, as have borne a respectable character all my life!"

The corner of her apron was here applied to her eyes.

"*Except*," broke in the heartless doctor, "*except*, Madam, when you figured in the Manchester Police Court, and got three months with hard labour! *Except*, when you were convicted of forgery at Liverpool, and transported for seven years! *Except*, when, after setting up this lodging-house, money was frequently lost in it by your lodgers, though the theft could not always be brought home to you!"

During the delivery of this address, Mrs. Macfarlane had

turned alternately white and red. Suddenly she left the room, conquered.

"Ah children!" said the doctor, gravely shaking his head, "see what hands you might have fallen into, through running away from home. How would it have been, but for Mrs. Thatcher, and your mamma, and me?"

"We feel it all," I replied, in deep sadness. "And it was all my doing!"

"No Winnie dear," pleaded Ben; "it was me, just as much."

And that was our last day at Prestford.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE next morning broke bright and clear, with every promise of a glorious day. The air had the cold crispness of early autumn. A dewy freshness lay upon the grass, and on the trees, now tinted with mellow gold and russet.

We were up betimes, eager for the day to begin, happy beyond words to express; for we were going home.

Dr. Gillias had advised our travelling by easy stages, in our own carriage, with our own horses and servants; and as Miss Gascoign (for so we still called her) had earnestly begged the doctor to accompany us, he, who never could refuse her anything, was to be of the party.

We had hardly patience to eat any breakfast, so great was our desire to be off; but at last all was ready, Ben and I were properly attired in the new garments which nurse had sent us, and we sat at the window, waiting for the carriage to appear.

"Here it is!" cried Ben at last, his poor little white face flushing up with delight. "Come, Winnie! Come, Miss Gascoign! Come, 'Mother'!"

For the moment casting off his weakness, Ben rushed out of the house, and along the garden path, followed by me. Regardless of manners, we pulled open the carriage door, to the great consternation of the footman, and, dashing in, took our seats with our backs to the horses. Then followed our mamma and Dr. Gillias; then, "Mother," who was hoisted into the rumble; and so, off we went. Before starting, however, the doctor made Ben seat himself beside our Mother.

"Now my little man," he said, "you just lean back, and keep quiet. We don't want to have you ill again, do we?"

But Ben could not keep quiet yet, for he was in the wildest spirits. As the day wore on, however, he grew very white, and leant back, and, once or twice, closed his eyes. Then the doctor gave him something out of "the magic phial," as we called it.

We had not been able to persuade "Mother" to go home with us. She declared, "the Crown and Anchor was that

heavy on her mind, she couldn't be off going back to it, now that she wasn't wanted for her dear little man. She had left in such a hurry, that everything would be 'at sixes and sevens.'" But she promised to come and stay with us directly Jack and Keziah were married. So we were to set her down at the station nearest to Kimberton.

"If you don't come very soon," said Dr. Gillias, "Mr. Travers will get a Habeas Corpus to fetch you."

"Dear! Dear! What new names will they give to carriages, next?" ejaculated Mrs. Thatcher, in her innocence.

"It is not a carriage," said the doctor. "But never mind. If you don't come, you will be fetched."

"Oh, I'll come, Sir—never fear," replied "Mother." "I shall be wanting to see my little man."

"Mr. Travers won't rest till he has seen you," pursued the doctor. "You saved his boy's life."

"Oh no, sir," pleaded Mrs. Thatcher, very earnestly; "it was you, and the lady. He was going fast when you came."

"He was; but he would have been *gone*, if you had not telegraphed to his sister to give him brandy, and if you had not nursed him till we came."

"But Joe, sir? he did more than me," persisted Mrs. Thatcher.

"Joe is a regular brick!" responded the doctor. "No one but Joe saved his life at Cellings; and no one but Joe came to the rescue, when that young ruffian was trying to hammer out his brains. He would have killed him, but for Joe."

We were now careering along most merrily. How pleasant it was, to be in brisk motion through the clear morning air. Then, to be in our own carriage once more; to hear the rapid trot of the horses' hoofs along the hard roads, and the jingling of the harness, as they tossed their heads and champed their bits. It was so home-like. By degrees, our first excitement calmed down; and, lulled by the soft and easy motion, I fell a-thinking.

"A penny for your thoughts, little woman!" said Dr. Gillias, pinching my arm.

"Oh! they are worth much more than that!" I replied.

"Why?"

"Because there are so many of them."

"Then I am to estimate them by quantity, not quality, eh?"

"Well, not that, exactly."

"Now, tell me what you were thinking of, just when I spoke."

"Perhaps I was thinking, what a dreadful hypocrite you have been, doctor!"

"How?"

"To have gone on calling Miss Gascoign, 'Miss Gascoign,' so naturally as you did, without ever betraying yourself once."

"There's the delinquent!" he said, pointing at her.

"Yes, Winnie dear, it was my doing," she replied. "Till you and Ben were well enough to bear the shock of learning that *I* was the 'ogre of a woman,' I asked the doctor to call me by my old name."

"But how can Winnie have the 'cheek' to find fault with me for calling you so, when she herself does it every minute, with malice 'pretence,' as Ben would say——"

"No I shouldn't, doctor! I know better than that!" stoutly protested Ben. "I should say 'malice *pro*pense.'"

We all laughed at Ben's amendment; I replied,

"I know I ought not to call you 'Miss Gascoign'; but it is so natural. Besides, I don't know what else to call you."

"Perhaps you will find another name for me some day, Winnie; meanwhile, call me anything you please, dear, *except* 'that ogre of a woman!'"

"But she *was* an ogre," I protested. "Wasn't she, Ben?"

"Yes," he replied; "she quite deserved the name—that other person did."

Neither Ben nor I could quite realize the fact, that our ideal of our detested step-mother had never really existed. It would be a long while before we could forget that "great fierce woman with a big nose." And we felt, somehow, that Miss Gascoign was the good angel who had saved us from this dreadful being.

"You call your father the 'Governor'; so I suppose you'll call his wife 'the Governess,'" suggested Dr. Gillias.

"No, that's Miss Parsons," said Ben. "Oh, what a shame to have forgotten her! What is she going to do?"

"Coming back to teach you," answered our Mother.

"But we are going to school, you know," I said, with a deep sigh.

"I hope not, dear."

"What?" we cried.

"I couldn't bear not to have you in the house, dears; it

would not seem the same without you. It will be so much nicer if we all keep together," went on this dear good angel of ours.

"You will be good children, I know; and Miss Parsons and I can teach you very well for the present, if only you will do your best, and help us."

I looked up, tried to speak, and failed. She continued,—"After a time Ben can have a tutor, till he goes to College. My brother thinks his new Curate would not mind giving up a few hours each day. You, Winnie dear, will do very well, with extra lessons from Ben's tutor, and extra masters in London during the season."

"Who planned it all?" I asked, in quavering tones.

"The 'ogre of a woman,' and no other," said Dr. Gillias. "I heard the whole discussion from beginning to end. Your father, remember, thought you were still at school, and that Ben had been taken ill there. Not able to stir from the sofa, he fumed and fretted, and kept saying, 'It is dreadful, those children being at school! If Ben were only ill here, I could see him, and know how he was, every half hour. But now he may get worse—he may be in danger—and I, not able to stir!' So then, Madam there, with her usual meddling malignity, dipped in her oar, and quietly responded, 'I never meant them to stay at school.' 'You didn't?' asked your father. 'No, I have arranged it all,' replied the Governess. And then she unfolded her step-motherish, mischief-making plans. The Governor was calmed; and when she asked if she should go off and nurse Ben, he consented."

"But you have written to Father, haven't you?" I asked, addressing our Mother.

"Yes dear, and have heard from him constantly."

"How is it he doesn't know, by the postmarks, where we are?"

"We were obliged to take your uncle Richard into the secret," said the doctor. "As he lives midway between the two schools, the letters pass through him, so that the postmarks are all right; and as she told him to address to her at the Post-office, 'To be called for,' your uncle Richard calls for them, and forwards them to her."

"I hope dear Father is being well seen to," I said.

"Oh yes; with nurse and Mr. Gascoign always looking after him, no fear," replied Dr. Gillias.

"We were so afraid Aunt Jem might not have married Mr. Pinchley, after all," said Ben,

"Oh yes," laughed the Doctor; "they have been man and wife for the last two months, or more. I dare say they are throwing plates and dishes at each other, by this time!"

And so we went on talking, till it was three hours since we left Prestford, and we were approaching the town where dear "Mother" was to leave us. I felt very sad at the thought, and had for some little time past been thinking over all her countless acts of goodness to us, poor little wanderers.

Ere long we had reached the railway station, and had alighted to see "Mother" off. It was soon over. "Mother" had given us both her last hug, and was whirled away in a flood of tears. We stood there, waving our hands, till the train was out of sight; and to the very last we could see "Mother" hanging out of the carriage window, brandishing a pocket handkerchief the size of a small sheet.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE is little more to tell. It was three days later, on a glorious autumn evening, when we swept into the long, elm-bordered drive, that led up to our darling home. Quicker and quicker we flew, nearer and nearer to the dear old house, and then we dashed round the sweep, and stopped at the door, already thrown wide open to admit us. And there stood nurse, and we flew into her arms; and then gentle Miss Parsons claimed our attention. But we said, "Where is Father?" and pressed on.

Miss Gascoign gently restrained us, and opened the library door. We would have rushed in; but her manner reminded us that we must be quiet, for Father's sake: so I pushed Ben a little before me—feeling that he had the best right to Father's first kiss. We crept up quietly to where he lay, looking so white and frail, with his arm strapped against his chest—all my doing! my doing! Shall I ever quite live down the oft-recurring pain of that thought—of how I brought suffering upon my dear father and my little Ben?

He greeted us with his own old smile; and his words, "My darlings!" were the sweetest music we had ever heard.

We were all very, very quiet for awhile; for no one could speak. Then Dr. Gillias put a few questions, and our dear new mother tenderly asked if he felt really stronger. And so, one by one, we fell into talk, gathered around our father's couch before the open window. The sun was sinking behind the trees, whose tops were gilded with his mellow glory. Ben and I nestled close down beside dear Father. Pearl and Vixen lay purring in our laps, and the kitten played about us. It was our own old home again; nothing was wanting.

The sun went down; the quiet evening shadows fell; and all was peace.

END OF PART FIRST.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

OF the time that followed—so sweet, yet so sad—how shall I tell? Often as I have tried to write it, my tears have fallen like rain upon the page, and blotted the record, and I have laid down the pen. But more years have passed away since I wrote the history of those few months; and now that Time has laid his gentle hand upon wounds that once refused to heal, I can look back quietly through the softened light of those years, and lay my hand upon my lips, and say, that "All is well."

Yes, all is well, for those dear ones and for me. I would not have it otherwise. In truth, God never *willingly* grieves nor afflicts the children of men. Even in His chastisements "He remembers mercy." He lays out our path before us; He says, "This is the way. Walk ye in it." If we choose another, easier, smoother, more alluring, and leave the one that He has bid us to walk in, we must bide the result. A precipice may lie in our way; we fall over it. A lion is on the path; he assails us. Then, though we have rebelled, we are not left to our fate. Bruised by our fall, wounded, in sore pain, He gently raises us, heals us, sets us again in the same safe path. Torn by the lion's paw, He yet rescues us, pours in healing oil, and again places us in the way that He would have us follow.

"Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and for the wonders that He doeth for the children of men!"

Work! work! Plenty of it, yet not too much. Good, healthy work, that produced wholesome results. Every hour made the most of, and something to show for every day. Our mother's method of allotting time, alway leaving a due

margin for relaxation and amusement, ensured a certain peace—a repose—in the house, which had before been sadly wanting. There was now a recognised head, from whose authority there was no appeal. Our father willed that it should be so, and we acquiesced with all our heart and soul. Punishment, there was none. If we did wrong, a little pained, disappointed look on our mother's face, made us so unhappy, that we strove never to repeat the offence.

We were allowed a whole month's holiday before setting to work. Meanwhile our mother, helped by Miss Parsons, carefully drew out a plan for the disposal of our time, submitted it for our father's approval, and then laying it before us, asked whether we would undertake to carry it out faithfully. I impetuously replied, that "of course we would, without even looking at it."

"No, dear," she remonstrated, "do not decide hastily. I wish you, both, to consider it well, and not to give me your answer till to-morrow. If you doubt your power to carry out your promise, do not promise at all. Or, if there is anything in it that you would like altered, give me your reasons, and if I think them good ones, I will comply."

"Oh, Mamma, you are such a brick!" I exclaimed. "Oh dear, oh dear! I have used that horrid word again, and you are vexed! But I *will* try—indeed I will—to cure myself of using boys' words."

"I know you will, my dear," she replied, gently drawing me to her side. "If you only knew how you pain me when you talk 'slang.' It is too much the habit amongst a certain class of girls now; but they are neither liked nor admired for it. I cannot endure a *fast* woman."

"Do you think *I* shall be a 'fast woman' dear Mamsey, if I don't mind?"

"Indeed I do, Winnie dear."

"Oh, pray, pray don't give up correcting me, then! Please to stop me for the least—least little word that sounds one bit like 'slang!'"

"You will find it very difficult, dear child. It is so much easier to fall into a bad habit, than to cure oneself of it when once formed."

"And is the dear Governor very much vexed with the 'slang?'" I suddenly checked myself. "There! I've done it again! Oh how difficult it is to remember! I ought to

have said 'Father.' Ben dear, you mustn't say 'Governor,' and then I shall not. It is so catching!"

"But boys may say 'Governor,' mayn't they, Mam dear?"

"Yes, Ben, though I don't like it; it is wanting in respect, and is *bad style*. Slang is not so objectionable in a boy as in a girl. Still it *is* objectionable—vulgar. Pure English is so much pleasanter to listen to; and 'Father,' is such a sweet word."

"Then I won't say 'Governor' any more," Ben stoutly rejoined. "And the dear Governor will——"

"Ah Ben!" I interrupted.

"Oh! it is dreadful!" exclaimed Ben. "I think it would be safer to speak French. Suppose we try—eh?"

"You will find that, in the 'plan,'" interposed our mother. "I must tell you, my dears, that your Aunt Jemima was quite right when she said you were very uneducated."

"Spiteful cat!" I exclaimed. "Ah, there I've forgotten myself again!" And I bit my lip with vexation.

"Winnie dear, until you learn to *feel* kindly towards your Aunt, you will always be in danger of *speaking* improperly about her."

"Oh Mother dear, I can't like her! I never can."

"'Never' is a long word, dear Winnie. Don't attempt too much at first. Try now to cease disliking your aunt; and before long you will perhaps begin to like her. I think there is much to like in your aunt."

"Oh, Mamsey, what?"

"Her quiet self-devotion to those she loves. Remember how she sacrificed her life to your father."

"Yes, that is true," I murmured.

"But oh, Mam dear," put in Ben, "I am sure you don't like Pinch—I mean Mr. Pinchley?"

She hesitated. I pressed her.

"Now Mamma, you *know* you don't like Mr. Pinchley," I urged.

"Indeed, Puss?" she replied, hardly able to suppress a smile. "But if I do not, it may be my fault. Perhaps I do not understand him."

"Well, I am glad you don't like him," I replied, assuming the fact.

"Now go and play, dears," replied our mother. "I am going to sit with your father."

And so the conference ended. Then we sat down, and proceeded to read Mamsey's "plan of work."

There were fixed hours for lessons, and the lessons were all specified. Then came the hours of recreation, and the kind of recreation was also specified, whether walking, riding, or driving. Every hour of the day had its allotted employment.

"What's this?" asked Ben—"gardening? Oh, we know all about that."

"Yes, of course," I said. "We don't need to learn that. Oh! I see—'In connection with botany.' That must be difficult."

"Needle-work," I pursued, resuming the "plan." "Ugh! I hate it!"

"Ah Winnie!" said Ben, with a half sigh, "do you remember when you tore your dress, and said you would have given anything to have learnt to sew?"

Any allusion to our flight from home, always brought me to my senses. Humbled at once, I replied, "Ah yes Ben; as if I could ever forget that, or all that happened! I will do my very best to learn sewing."

"'French conversation'—ah, yes—" I resumed.

"'Latin,'" pursued Ben—"Umph."

And so on. But it ended in our yielding our cordial assent to the "plan," and in thanking our dear mother for taking so much trouble. And so, as I have said, we had plenty of work to do, and we did it with all our heart.

CHAPTER II.

I DID not know, at that time, that our dear mother's chief motive for thus parcelling out our days—even more than the absolute necessity of remedying our defective education, was to get us—me especially—into habits of discipline, self-denial, and self-control. It cost me many a struggle before I could at all conquer my aimless desultory habits. Often I fell back; sometimes, I felt tempted to give up altogether. Once I was on the point of going to my mother and beseeching her to send me to a strict school, where I should be compelled by others to do what was right, instead of having to carry out the conflict myself. A simple incident turned me back, sad and humbled; I caught my dress in the lock of the door, and tore it. I would not thus enter my mother's presence, and so I paused. Then came to me the memory of my torn dress, that day in the country, and of all that followed, and I wept. Sad and subdued, I yet gathered courage to resolve—even to make a sort of childish vow—that so long as my dear mother would have patience with my short-comings, I would strive hard to conquer them.

A month had passed since our return, and our father had not yet been told that we had run away from home. Our mother and Miss Parsons constantly urged us to make confession, but we shrank from it in great dread, the more so as he had not yet recovered from his accident, looked pale and feeble, and was easily upset. Our mother said that he ought to be told, and Mr. Gascoign was most emphatic, saying that we "had no right to be sailing under false colours."

"I have a great mind to tell him myself," he said, one day.

"Oh no, no!" we both cried in one breath.

"I will, if you don't do it soon, mind," he continued.

"But," I pleaded, "dear papa is so much happier, not knowing it."

"That is not the point in question. The question is, whether it is right for children to deceive a parent, even though they consider it to be for his good."

"But," I still argued, "suppose he were in such a dangerous state of health, that it would kill him to let him know the truth, there would be no harm in it then."

"No; but then the deception would have to cease directly he was strong enough to hear the truth. And he is strong enough now."

I sighed.

"The fact is, Winnie," said Mr. Gascoign, "you cannot be really penitent for your mis-doings. If you were, you would do everything in your power to atone. I wonder how you can laugh, or play, or find any enjoyment, or any peace, whilst wilfully living in a state of deception—and towards a father—and such a father."

I knew he was right. My own heart condemned me. Yet still I let day after day pass, without confessing my fault. I was dreadfully distressed to lie under Mr. Gascoign's displeasure; his cold stern manner cut me to the heart. But still I delayed doing the right thing.

"Ah Winnie," said our mother, "you had plenty of courage to leave your father's home! You did not shrink from the pain you thought you would cause him, then!"

But still the days went on, and I had not told him. It was misery, to meet the full look of trust in his face, to hear him blame himself for having sent us to school. It was misery; yet still I delayed.

One day our father had a letter from Aunt Jemima; it was taken to him in the library, where our mother was sitting with him. In a few moments the bell pealed violently. Some minutes later, nurse came quickly into the schoolroom.

"Keep quiet, dears," she said; "Your papa is ill—in a faint, or something. The doctor is sent for."

I was starting up, to run to my father; but nurse and Miss Parsons interposed. "Your mamma says you are on no account to come, Miss Winnie."

I sat down in hopeless anguish, and we both waited for more news.

"All our doing, Ben!" I sobbed. "I am afraid our dear father will never again be the same that he was!"

Presently Miss Parsons, who had gone to enquire, came back with the news that Father was better. Then came the doctor, who pronounced it to be a recurrence of the nervous seizure which had followed his accident.

"His nerves are shattered, and his heart is very weak," he said. "Any sudden shock should be avoided. Have you any idea of the cause of the present attack?"

"A letter from Jemima," said our mother.

"Ahem! Bad news?"

"Telling him about the children's running away."

"A pity! It will throw him back; and he can't afford to lose any strength."

That night, when bed-time came, our mother told us that Ben was to come for one minute, and say goodnight to Papa.

"I too, Mamma," I said, preparing to accompany her.

"No Winnie, you are not to see your father to-night."

She spoke so low, and looked so very sad, that I piteously faltered, "Oh Mamma—why?"

"He knows all, Winnie, and the sight of you would distress him too much."

She left the room with Ben. I pleaded no more. Crushed, appalled, I crept to my own room, and wept hopelessly.

Presently Ben came. He tried to console me, but in vain. Then our mother insisted on his going to bed.

"I cannot stay long with you, Winnie," she said; "your father needs all my care. But you must try to check this excessive grief. Do not think that there is no hope. You have done wrong; but you have learnt a lesson, and I do not think you will ever forget it. Be comforted, dear. It is not too late yet, for you to turn over a new leaf." She tenderly kissed me, and withdrew.

Then the floodgates of my sorrow broke down, and I gave way to a wild storm of passionate grief. I could not be comforted. An hour must have passed away, yet still I lay sobbing in the dark on the bed, where I had thrown myself when mamma left me.

Presently there came a faint streak of light through the chink of the door. It was softly opened, and my mother entered. Her very presence brought me such comfort, that my sobs ceased, and I clung to her as she bent over me.

"It is not *right* to give way so uncontrollably, my dear. You must get up, and let me undress you. Your father is asleep now, and I shall not be missed."

I submitted quietly, feeling too weak to say or do anything. When I was comfortably tucked up in the cool white sheets, Mamma sat down beside me.

"Winnie, dear," she began, "you are sorry for the past? —I know you are."

I could only press her hand, in token of assent.

"Are you willing to do, now, what I tell you?"

I tried to whisper, "now, and always."

"Then, the first thing is, to make a great effort at self-control. You can do nothing without it, my child."

I again pressed her hand. She went on, "If you do not gain self-control now, while you are young, you will hardly gain it when you are older. Ah child! not only your own happiness, but the happiness of all whom you love, might be marred, by your want of self-control. Make a great effort to check this violent grief. Some sorrow is natural and right, but it should not be allowed to gain the mastery, or to make others suffer. I should be miserable all through this night, if I thought you were lying awake."

"Oh Mamma darling! Mamma darling!" I murmured.

"Will you try then, dear?"

"Yes Mamma, indeed I will."

"Have you said your prayers, child?"

"Not yet, Mamma; I forgot."

"Forgot, my dear! How could you? It is so natural, when we are in trouble, to pray for help and comfort!"

"I don't think I have prayed enough, Mamma."

"Then, that is why you have fallen into trouble, poor child. Pray—pray, with all your heart, or you will not be able to carry out a single good resolution. Your own strength is nothing, and is sure to fail you when most needed. Pray for a strength that can *never* fail. Will you, dear?"

"I will—I promise it, Mamma."

"Did you say your prayers, Winnie, that night you left home?"

"No indeed, Mamma."

"You would not have dared, would you?"

"No Mamma."

"Did you pray while you were away?"

"I said my prayers every night and morning."

"What did you pray for?"

"Oh, not much. I prayed that dear Papa might not be very angry with me, and might not forget me. And I prayed that we might not meet with a railway accident. And oh! I *did* pray, when Ben was ill! And I *did* thank God after he was saved from the sea!"

"And you never asked God to send a blessing on what you were doing?"

"No Mamma, I should not have dared."

"Now, if you had really loved God, and set His will above your own, ought not the feeling that He disapproved of the course you were running, to have turned you back home—at once—at *once?*"

"Indeed yes, Mamma."

"Think of this to-morrow dear, but sleep now. You are calmer, and, I think, happier?"

"Yes, Mamma. And Papa, is he better?"

"Yes, dear."

"May I see him to-morrow?"

"We shall see. Perhaps."

"Is he *very* angry with me?"

"No—only grieved."

"That is worse."

"It is."

Again kissing me, she left me for the night.

Mindful of my promise, I checked the bitter rising of my grief, and prayed earnestly. That brought peace, and I slept.

CHAPTER III.

PAPA was better the next day, and I was allowed to see him, on condition that I behaved with self-control, so as not to agitate him.

Before going into his room, I prayed for strength to keep my word; for I felt very trembling and nervous.

My dear father looked terribly white and frail. It needed all the strength I could muster, to prevent my giving way. I stood for a moment just within the door. Then he called me to him. His voice was very faint, but oh! so sweet!

"My Winnie!"

I went quietly forward, and bent down for his kiss.

"I am not to talk to you, Papa dear," I said, in as steady a voice as I could manage. "I have promised to control myself, and not to upset you. But when you are well enough, I will tell you how sorry I am—how I repent."

Then I left the room, but not before I had caught sight of my dear mother's radiant smile of approval. She followed, the next minute, and, finding me sitting a few steps lower on the stairs, with my head buried in my hands,— for, struggle as I might, the reaction was too much for me,— she said, "You have done well, my child. This has been the first effort at self-control you have ever made. Now go to your room, bathe your eyes, and then, off to the school-room, and try your very best to please Miss Parsons. Ben is there now."

Our kind, patient little governess was even more forbearing than usual that morning, for my head ached sadly, and I was very stupid at my lessons. But they came to an end at last; and then Ben and I went into the garden for our hour's play before dinner. It was a lovely dewy autumn day, almost like summer. The grass was all beaded over, and the flowers were steeped in heavy dew, and rich with colour and perfume. A robin was singing his little clear song, perched on a rose-tree. We did not go far, but seated ourselves on a rustic bench under a tree.

"Winnie," said Ben, "do you notice what a change has come over Miss Parsons? She is so jolly and perky. She used to look as if some giant had put one big hand under her feet, and the other on top of her head, and had flattened her

between them. And oh! what headaches she did have! She doesn't have them now."

"Ah Ben! Ben!" I sighed.

"Do you think it was *us?*" asked Ben.

"'*Us*' is wrong grammar, dear," I remonstrated. "But I do think we drove poor Miss Parsons wild, with our beastly ways."

"'Beastly'" retorted Ben, nettled at my remark about his grammar, "is not a word for a girl. *I* may use it, being a boy."

"No Ben, for it is not elegant—not pure English."

"Oh dear!" said Ben, in a mincing tone, that reminded me of Mrs. Warner, "Oh dear me, mem! I will endeavour to be more retrospect in future, mem. I meant to say——."

"Don't use fine words, Ben dear, unless you understand their meaning. You mean *circumspect*—not *retrospect*."

"Ah well, it doesn't matter, so long as one makes oneself understood. But really, Winnie, do you think we worried poor dear Miss Parsons into headaches?"

"Indeed I do. We were the rudest, most selfish children imaginable. Even now, though we are trying to do better, our ignorance and stupidity must be very trying."

"Poor Miss Parsons!" mused Ben. "We must try not to be so ignorant."

"That can only be, by plodding at our lessons, and trying to *understand* them; not learning them by rote, like parrots."

"I wonder how it is—" said Ben, and then he stopped.

"How what is, dear?" I asked, struck by the troubled look in his dear little face.

"It is so strange," he said, "that though I now try, with all my strength, to learn my lessons, I can't do it half so easily as I used to before I was ill. Then, I could have learnt them so quickly, if I had chosen."

"I suppose your head is still weak from the fever, darling," I replied, glancing at him with a strange feeling of anxiety. What, if he should never be so strong again? What, if that dreadful fever should have done injury, that could never be undone?

"We haven't French-conversationed to-day, Winnie. Suppose we do it now?"

"All right Ben. Get on. Oh dear! there I am, talking like a boy again!" I sighed.

"Never mind, dear," Ben soothingly replied, "you seldom do so now. But of course one can't expect to cure oneself of a bad habit, all at once. Now for the lingo! You begin."

I began accordingly. "'Celle-ci est une jour sucrée,' Ben."

"'Je ne vous comprong paw,'" demurred Ben.

"'A sweet day,' Ben. 'Sucrée' is sweet, you know."

"Of course. Well, here goes for *my* remark. 'Cette Robin Redbreast chante puits.'"

"What on earth do you mean, Ben?"

"'Puits'—well; sings well. Nothing could be plainer," said Ben, a little annoyed.

"Oh Ben, that's the wrong 'well.' That's the 'well' that holds water. You should have used the part of speech—'Well'—a—a noun, I think."

"Now Winnie, there lies the difficulty of the French language. That is what I never can get over. They have so many words to our one. No wonder they are such a jabbering, chattering race. I'm afraid I shall never do much at French."

"Oh yes, you will," I said. "We must both expect to find difficulty and trouble in learning, after wasting so much time in idleness. The fact is, we know *nothing*."

"That is true, Winnie. Why, we don't even understand gardening. Weren't you ashamed, when mamma came to see how we had done our gardens, and found everything wrong?"

"Yes indeed; and didn't they look lovely, after *she* had done them?"

"Oh Winnie, if we had only known she was to be our new mother! We shouldn't have run away from home, I shouldn't have had that dreadful illness, and, most of all, the dear Governor—Papa, I mean—would not have hurried back, and so, been in that railway accident."

"Darling Papa!" I murmured, very sadly. "Oh! will he ever be able to trust me again?"

"It was me, just as much as you," remonstrated Ben; "more, in fact. I soused Aunt Jem and old Pinchley; not you."

"Ah yes, and the poor drawing-room!" I sighed. "What *will* Papa say, when he sees it?"

"I was wondering, as we were coming home, whether there had been time to have it re-papered and furnished. But of course, poor Papa's illness, and then Mamma's coming away so suddenly to us, prevented that," said Ben.

"I haven't had courage to go in yet. Have you, Ben?"

"No—perhaps it may not be so bad as we thought. Shall we go and see now?"

"Yes, come along."

We returned to the house, and very softly opened the drawing-room door. Then we certainly were taken by surprise. The drawing-room looked as fresh and unsullied as though no dreadful garden engine had ever discharged its sooty contents over it!

"It did happen—didn't it?" stammered Ben, in utter amazement.

For a moment I felt as if I were in a dream. I paused. Then the scene recurred to me only too vividly. How Ben had been driven to fury by Mr. Pinchley's abuse of me; how he had shouted out "liar and sneak;" how he had pumped the sooty shower over Mr. Pinchley and Aunt Jemima, and had also literally watered everything in their vicinity. I remembered it all, too distinctly.

"Oh yes, it did happen, Ben. But how ever——."

"Let us ask nurse," said Ben. And off we went to her.

"It was all your dear mamma's doings," she said. "I told her how Ben had got in a passion with Mr. Pinchley for speaking against his sister, and had given him a bath; and so she said that we must try and not vex your papa by letting him see the drawing-room in that state. Your Aunt Jemima had never gone into it after, but she and Mr. Pinchley used to sit in the library; and I told the servants the chimney had been on fire, and that, in putting it out, the water and soot had spoilt the paper and furniture. I thought I would take upon myself to send for work-people, to re-paper that part of the wall, and take up the carpet, and have it cleaned——"

"But nurse dear, you shouldn't have told a story, even to help us," I remonstrated.

"Well, perhaps I shouldn't dear, but I did," replied nurse. "Where was I? Oh, I was going to try and set it all right, when, one day, a carriage came up very slowly to the house, and there was your papa in it, looking like dead—so white and deathly, with blood on his face, and his eyes shut, and poor Miss Gascoign—your mamma, I mean (bless her!)—as white as a sheet, but very quiet and calm, helping to lift him out of the carriage, and carry him upstairs, and giving her orders so clear and distinct; only I could tell by her voice stopping suddenly sometimes, as if she couldn't help it, and her mouth trembling, how she felt it——."

"Oh nurse! nurse!"

"At first it seemed as if your papa must die—for days and days we thought it——."

"And *we* so happy, just then!"

"— And he wouldn't have got through it if it hadn't been for that dear lady, who is more like one of God's angels than a woman! But he rallied, and then rallied again, and the doctor at last said he would recover, though he would never be what he had been before the accident."

"My doing! my doing!" I groaned.

"When the time came, I told your mamma about the drawing-room, and she went with me to look at it. Then she asked if there was any of the same paper in the house; and when I found it, she got some paste, and the tall steps, and she and Mr. Gascoign re-papered that piece of the wall just as well as a paperer would have done, bless you! Then she and I tried our hand on the carpet, but we couldn't manage that; so she and Mr. Gascoign took it up themselves—yes, their own selves, so as not to make any noise,—and had it sent away to be cleaned, the chair covers too—(lucky that the chintz covers were on!) When the carpet came back, they were in a sad way about getting it down without making a noise; but then your mamma went to your papa's room, and listened, while one or two nails were driven in, and the sound was so faint, your papa did not even notice it. And so the whole thing was done."

"Winnie dear," said our mother, entering the nursery, "your papa insists upon seeing you, and hearing, from yourself, all that happened while you were away. Nothing else will satisfy him. Nay, my dear, don't be frightened; he is not angry."

"Oh, mamma! Mamma!"

"Go, my dear. The longer you hesitate, the harder it will be."

"You will come with me, Mother?"

"No, dear. Your father wishes to see you alone; and he is right."

My dear father was laid upon the couch in his room, looking very ill; but he smiled upon me, and, holding out his arms, said, "My Winnie!"

I crept forward, and knelt at his feet; but he drew my head to his breast and pressed a kiss upon my brow, and bade me bring a little low chair, and sit close beside him. Then I told him all.

"My child," he said, when I had ceased speaking, and there had been silence for a minute or two, "you sinned

grievously; and grievously were you punished. But oh, my dear, how was it, you did not tell me all, frankly and freely? Why did you leave me to discover it in the sudden way that I have done?"

"At first, Papa, you were not well enough to be told. Afterwards, I was afraid."

"Afraid! Of me?"

"Not afraid of *you*, Papa; but afraid of your loving me less—of your thinking as ill of me as—as I deserved."

I hung my head in deep shame and sorrow.

"But, Winnie, you should have remembered, that even if I *had* loved you less, it was still the *right* thing, to tell the truth. How could you bear to look in my face, and to know you were deceiving me?"

"I could not bear it, Father. It made me wretched. And I meant to tell you; indeed I did. But I put it off, every day."

"Ah, child! that 'putting off' is at the bottom of an incredible amount of sorrow in this world! Never put off for one moment, that which ought to be done *now*. '*Now*' is our own; 'bye and bye' is not ours."

"I see how wrong it was, Papa; and how foolish, too."

"Will you promise, darling, never again to keep from me or your mother, anything that you know you ought to tell?"

"Not even if you are ill, and it would make you worse to know it, father?"

"Not even then, dear."

I hesitated; then answered. "Papa, if you were ill, I would tell Mamma; and if Mamma were ill, I would tell you."

"That will do, my dear. I am quite satisfied."

"Dear Father, if I could undo the past!"

"I am not sure that I wish it undone, Winnie."

"Oh, Papa! Why not?"

"I think you were so terribly wilful and headstrong, that nothing but a very severe lesson would have checked you, and brought you to a better frame of mind. You wanted *humility*, my dear."

"Ah yes, Papa; I am sure of that. I had to be made to despise myself thoroughly, before I could amend. But oh, Papa, if only I had not been the cause of your illness!"

I could not keep back my tears; they fell unrestrained.

"My child, are we not told that 'all things work together for good,' to those who choose to receive them, as coming

from a loving God? Depend upon it, this illness of mine, even though it were permanent—even though it shortened my life—would be 'for good' in some way or other. You will perhaps see the reason, later."

"I wish I *could* see it," I sobbed. "And Ben's illness, too! Ben hasn't looked the same, since that fever."

My father sighed.

"If Ben had died, Papa—oh! if he had died—could you then have forgiven me?"

"It would have been hard to do so, my dear. It would have been a fearful grief to me—a most crushing blow. My darling boy!" he murmured.

"I wish Ben could be made stronger, Father,"

"So do I, my dear; but he never was very strong. He was a very delicate baby, and Dr. Gillias used to say that he would never grow up to be a man," he sighed.

"Does Dr. Gillias say so now?" I cried.

"He never does, my dear; but then, I never ask him. I believe he would not have been so strong and well as he is, but for your Aunt Jemima's care. By the way, here is her letter. You may read it, dear. Take it away with you, and ask your mother to come to me."

I took Aunt Jemima's letter to my own room to read. It ran thus:—

"My dear Brother,

"I cannot help feeling hurt and grieved (justly so, Anselm says) at your want of candour in writing about the children. I say 'want of candour,' because I am loth to apply a harsher term. Have I deserved it? (Anselm says I have not.) How could you speak of Ben having had the fever at school, and of Helen having gone there to nurse him, and of her having brought back both the children, when you knew, perfectly well, that they never went near the school, but eloped from home during your absence, taking with them what money they had, and wandering about the country (like vagabonds, as Anselm says). No doubt they had a pleasant time of it, so long as their money lasted! Mr. Gascoign of Kimberton has been visiting us lately, and tells us, that he saw them in church, with the landlady of some low inn or other (no doubt, a coarse, drunken woman, Anselm thinks). Nice company for your son and daughter, my poor brother!

"But why should you try to deceive me, about their being at school, when I could not fail to know of their disgraceful conduct? They ran away a week before my marriage; so of course I knew all about it. I suppose you thought they had eloped after my departure, and that I should never hear the truth!

"Anselm does not blame Ben. He says the boy ought to be sent to a strict school, where he would get all his nonsense kicked or thrashed out of him; but he thinks nothing except a Reformatory will be of the slightest use for Winnie, who (he says) appears to be thoroughly hardened—sunk in trespasses and sins. Oh! my brother, listen to the words of so good a man! He bids me say, that if he can offer you any further advice, as to the management of your children, he will at any time cheerfully lay aside half an hour from his other duties, and will give you his thoughts.

"It is a most precious privilege to be in daily converse with a mind like his, so elevated in its tone, so free from human weakness, so clear, so acute, so refined! I have told him that I am sure you will thankfully seek his advice.

"My dear husband unites with me in kindest love to yourself and Helen, and best remembrances to Miss Parsons. We do not at present feel justified in sending any expression of affection to Winnie or Ben. Anselm says, we ought thus to evince our sorrowful indignation.

"Believe me, my dear Brother,

"Your distressed, yet ever loving Sister,

"JEMIMA PINCHLEY.

"P.S.—My husband says, that he thinks he feels justified in telling Winnie, that 'he makes her a subject of prayer.' What a privilege, to be the subject of such a man's prayers!"

"Nasty old canting humbug!" cried Ben, in a great passion. He had come into my room, and had found me in tears over the letter.

"But, Ben, there is a great deal of truth in it—so far as I am concerned, at least; though it sounds a little unkind, too. But oh, my darling! to talk of sending you to school, to be kicked and thrashed! You poor little fellow! What have *you* done?"

"It is well that we have a dear, good, *too* loving father, who won't be set against us by *anyone*, Winnie."

"Our dear father! How ill we have behaved!" I sighed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE autumn passed away, very softly and happily, and oh, so swiftly, in earnest, hopeful work, in the constant unceasing endeavour to set aside one's selfishness, to put down one's own evil will, to make others happy, to atone somewhat for the past. And the task, at first so hard, grew easier, then pleasant, then became no task at all, but a sort of habit; and happiness was the result.

Yes, happiness, such as I had never known before. To feel that I was living *in earnest*, not frittering away my time without definite purpose. At first, my motive was simply a wish to make reparation, to show my father and mother, that I was sincerely penitent, and ready to give deeds, not words, in token of that penitence. Later, I was impelled by a higher and purer motive, and I felt it due to Him who gave me strength to amend, to offer up to Him the first fruits of my thoughts, my time, my labour. Of myself, I should never have come to this; but I was gradually brought to see it, by my dear mother, my good angel in this, as in all else.

Dear Ben was much as before, he needed so little amendment; but my father and mother said, that my example did him as much good as it had formerly done harm.

And so that pleasant autumn passed away, and winter came.

That winter was a very cold one, and it brought us extra work in attendance on the poor. Our mother did not approve of giving away either money or clothing, where she considered people ought to be able to provide for themselves; and her brother was of the same opinion.

"Why pauperise the poor, and destroy their pride?" he said. "You do it, if you teach them to beg, or, what is much the same, to accept help which they ought to do without."

"Mr. Pinchley used to say, that poor people had no *right* to be proud," I said.

"That was his view; but it is not mine," replied Mr. Gascoign, in the cold, estranged tone, in which he always now addressed me. "A degree of what is called 'proper pride,' is highly to be enouraged, I think."

"Pinchley says, there is no such thing as 'proper pride,'" said our father. "He holds, that all pride is improper."

"Pinchley is a good enough fellow, in some ways; but he doesn't look far enough. Like many narrow-minded people, he lays down certain small dogmatic rules, which are good to a certain extent, and no farther."

"What is proper pride?" I timidly put in.

"The pride—or rather *self-respect*—which will keep a man from doing anything mean, low, cowardly. To beg, is mean, unless it is justified by direst need; or, to accept charity, without absolute necessity. To frequent low company, or indulge in low pursuits, is low. To oppress, injure, or, attack a helpless person, whether by personal violence, or by defamation of character, is cowardly. From all this, 'proper pride' will keep us."

"And what is *im*proper pride?" asked Ben, much interested.

"Pride of wealth, birth, position, intellect, etc."

"Poor people can hardly have that sort of pride," I said; "because they have neither wealth, birth, position, nor intellect."

"I beg your pardon, Winnie; they *think* they have. Some Hodge, who works in the fields, and supports his family on his twelve or fourteen shillings a week, will look down with contempt upon the poor old pauper who, unable to work, and not having any relations to support him, goes to the workhouse. The Misses Hodge will not condescend to associate with the old pauper's orphan grandchildren, also in the "house." The cottager's wife, a step above Hodge, who rents a larger cottage, and, perhaps, has a little field and a cow, looks down upon Hodge's wife. And so on, upwards, through all society; *im*proper pride is far commoner than proper pride. I have known people, not too proud to accept kindness from those whom, though they greeted them most cordially if they met them in a bye road in the country, they would affect not to see, if they met them in the society of others, who might think less of them if they recognised those friends *as* friends."

"But that is downright snobbish," exclaimed Ben.

"Yes, all *im*proper pride *is* 'downright snobbish,' as you say, Ben," said Mr. Gascoign, laughing.

"Certainly," said papa, "and you never find people with that sort of pride, who have really anything to be proud of. You generally see pride of wealth, in those who have not been born wealthy; pride of station, in those who, originally of low birth, have attained position suddenly and unexpectedly;

pride of intellect, in those who have no real intellect to be proud of. People *born* noble, or *born* wealthy, are generally of unaffected and easy manners; and people of real intellect are, for the most part, singularly unassuming. Genius is invariably modest; at least I have found it so. But what does Helen say about it all?"

"I say, that I am going to pour out tea, and, after that, sing to you, if you like."

This offer was as usual received with universal acclamation. Tea was soon over; and we settled ourselves quietly down, as we always did when our mother sang; our father, resting on the couch; Ben and I, near him, Ben's arms round my neck.

Mr. Gascoign sat near the piano, his eyes resting on the singer. He was always enrapt by his sister's music.

How well I can remember it! The large lofty room; the heavy curtains drawn close before the shuttered windows; the glowing fire; the half-shaded light from the chandelier; the group, gathered near the piano; the exquisite tones of our mother's soft rich voice.

Merrily, merrily o'er the blue ocean
  A little bird flew, one bright summer day;
Cheerily, cheerily, in the glad sunlight,
  Singing a rapturous, heart-thrilling lay.

"Happiness, happiness lies all before me,
  Sky ever cloudless, and sea ever bright;
Blissful the journeying, blissful the dwelling there,
  On, swiftly on, to a land of delight!"

But night fell; then, wearily o'er the dark waters,
  The little bird struggled, her sweet life to save,
Fainting, despairing, her little heart failing,
  Down she fell, fluttering, into the wave.

We had not heard that song before, and were silent when it came to a close, so profoundly melancholy had been the last few bars.

I felt a little shiver run through Ben's frame, and, looking quickly round, exclaimed,

"Why, Ben is crying!"

Our mother turned, and catching him in her arms, exclaimed, "What is the matter, darling?"

"Oh mamma, why didn't the dear brave little bird live? Couldn't a boat come up, and save him? Or mightn't a log of wood be handy for him to cling to?"

"Perhaps, dear. Now Winnie, I want you to let your papa hear you play that little nocturne of Leybach's."

I complied, with quaking heart, making, alas! many a blunder, but ending tolerably well. Papa looked surprised and pleased, and exclaimed, "Well done, Winnie! You *must* have worked hard."

But Mamma, determined that I should receive the full reward of my labours, said, "She did it very nicely; but she was nervous, poor child. You should have heard her do it this morning—without one mistake. You must play something every night to your papa, Winnie, and so get over your nervousness."

After that, I performed a duet with Miss Parsons, and then another little solo; better, this time, for I was not so nervous.

Then I left the piano, and drew a chair near our mother, who had been writing something on a scrap of paper, which Ben was reading.

"And so, the dear little bird was saved!" exclaimed Ben, radiant with delight. "Oh! sing it please, Mamsey!"

Our mother resumed her seat at the piano, and continued the story of the little wandering bird.

THE WAVELET.

A bright little wavelet, just kissing the shore,
The tired bird gently and swiftly upbore,
Her weary wings softly she folded in sleep,
And forgot in her slumbers the terrible deep.

And next morn when the sun bathed the land in his rays,
Her little voice carolled its sweet hymn of praise,
To Him who the wavelet had sent to her aid,
To Him whom the winds and the ocean obeyed.

"That's very nice," said Ben, when the song had ceased. "Oh Mamma dear, why didn't you sing it at first?"

Our mother smiled. "Because it had not happened, then, dear. The little bird was not saved, then."

"How?" we asked.

"I had to invent two more verses, while Winnie was playing."

"Did you invent it all, out of your own head?" asked Ben, with dilating eyes.

"Yes, Ben. Why not?"

"My!" exclaimed Ben, with more emphasis than elegance.

"We are not to say 'My!' Ben," I interposed. "But, who made the music, Mother? Did you make that, too?"

"Yes, dear."

"Out of your own head?" asked Ben.

Mamma smiled, kissed him, and said it was bed-time. So we said good-night, and went to-bed.

"I can't help feeling anxious about Ben," said Father, after we had gone; "he is so dreadfully nervous and sensitive,—so like a girl. I am afraid he will never be manly."

Mamma sighed. Mr. Gascoign answered,

"I incline to agree with you. School, and roughing it, will do something, though."

"Oh! *not* school!" pleaded our mother. "Ben is not fit for roughing it; certainly not at present, at all events."

"You are right, Helen," said our father. "The child is extremely delicate. Rough treatment, insufficient nourishment, exposure to cold, or over-fatigue, would be fatal to him. He has not yet recovered from the effect of the fever."

"For which you have to thank Winnie," said Mr. Gascoign.

"Oh Gerald, pray don't speak of poor Winnie in that way!" put in the dear mother. "She is so truly penitent—so earnest in her endeavour to make amends for the past."

"As yet, it is rather premature to pronounce judgment as to her penitence," drily observed Mr. Gascoign. "Perhaps after twelve months of this earnest effort, we may be able to award a favourable verdict. Winnie used to be a great pet of mine; but I cannot say she is now, and I don't think I shall easily forget the irreparable mischief she has caused by her inconceivable—yes, her *inconceivable* selfishness."

He spoke warmly—almost bitterly. He was strongly attached to our father; in fact, the friendship between the two dated from the time when both were boys at school; he, a little lad of six, when my father was head boy in the school. He was my father's "fag," and my father was his champion.

CHAPTER V.

I MUST slip over a whole year, passed in the same routine of active, pleasant work, and social happiness.

Some few events occurred to break the quiet even tenor of our tranquil life; but as each month passed away, we seemed to be happier than the last. Our parents were more than pleased with us, and good Miss Parsons had budded into the brightest and most serene little body imaginable. We felt that we could not do enough, to make amends for the past.

My happiness had only two drawbacks. The first was, that my father, though able to take his share in our walks and drives, and free from active illness, was evidently in most delicate health. I saw, but too plainly, that he had never been the same that he was before the accident; and I feared that he never would be. His step was languid, his form a little bowed, his voice less firm. The slightest sudden noise, caused him to start; the colour would fly to his face, and then desert it, leaving him deadly pale. Sometimes, as though involuntarily, he would lay his hand upon his side, as if to still pain. The very movement of his hands expressed languor and fatigue. Bitter was my self-reproach—bitter, but unavailing.

My other cause of sorrow lay in Mr. Gascoign's changed manner. I had hoped that he would at last have become convinced that I was really repentant and resolved to do my best; but now, when more than twelve months had passed away, his manner was still reserved, and almost distant. It was a sad grief to me.

Mrs. Thatcher paid us a visit in the summer. She could only stay with us for one month, and we had a holiday for that time, and thus the good creature could have "her dear little man" to herself, to her heart's content. We could no longer call her "Mother"; that sweet name now belonged to her who was our mother indeed; but as she told us that many of the good folks called her "Granny," we took to calling her "Granny" too; and thus, everybody was satisfied.

Well, her visit was the grand event of that year; but there were one or two minor events, of some consequence in my eyes at the time. I took to long dresses, and my thick

flowing locks were exchanged for a coiffure more suitable to my height and age—yes, age, for I had now passed my sixteenth birthday; and was "a young lady," as nurse said.

This Christmas, I first took a class in the Sunday school; with nervous apprehension, and with many doubts of my fitness and ability for the task; and after much heart-searching, and much earnest prayer for help and guidance. I never had ceased to feel shame and contrition, and to have a low opinion of myself, since that sad time, which now seemed so long ago. I wondered whether I should ever outlive the sorrow that time had caused me. It seemed as if I never could. And thus it was, with a quiet subdued feeling, that I sat down with my little class around me. But after the first strangeness, I became deeply interested in this work, and used even to visit my little scholars during the week. I loved them, and I believe, that in their simple fashion, they cared for me. Sometimes they put me very puzzling questions, which I found it difficult to answer; and sometimes their remarks were so ludicrous, that I had much ado to keep from laughing. But, on the whole, my mother was well pleased with my class, so I knew that I was doing my best. And I found that this new task entailed an amount of responsibility, beyond that which I owed to the poor little things themselves; I had to be very sure, that I myself was not committing the very sins against which I cautioned them. Ben had undertaken a class of very little boys, and it was wonderful how he managed to interest the little fellows in what he taught them. Ben was a better teacher than I.

I had not yet been confirmed, but my mother thought I should be ready for confirmation this year. I looked forward to it with much fear and trembling, yet with the hope that I might be worthy to receive the solemn rite.

This year, too, I had begun to learn drawing, for which mamma said I possessed decided talent. Both she and our father, as well as Miss Parsons, expressed themselves perfectly satisfied with our progress during the year.

Aunt Jemima's departure had left a gap in the parish work, some portion of which my mother had wished me to take up. So I visited such of the cottagers as she named, at first accompanied by herself or Miss Parsons, afterwards alone.

Thus my mother had more time to devote to my father,

who seemed each day less disposed to leave his comfortable chair in the library.

It was the beginning of December, and bitterly cold. We had had some sharp frost, and one or two falls of snow; but the snow had not laid long, nor been deep. Sharp cutting winds had followed, and dispersed it, and then a bitter black frost succeeded.

One day I went forth to see one or two poor people; amongst others, old Betty Lake, who was sure to have "the rheumatiz bad," in this bitter weather. It was freezing hard, and an icy wind blew straight in my face as I walked along. Spite of thick woollen garments and furs, I felt as if I could not keep warm that day. My fingers ached intolerably within my warm muff, and I could almost have cried with the pain. Walking very fast was almost impossible, for I had neglected to tie that good old-fashioned remedy, list, round my boots, and I slipped constantly. Ben had not been allowed to come with me, for he had a bad cough, and Doctor Gillias forbade exposure to the cold. Perhaps if he had been with me, I should not have thought so much of the cold, for we should have laughed and talked all the way.

I reached Betty's cottage first, and entered it, only too glad to be under shelter. Then I sat down, prepared to listen to a doleful account of "rheumatiz." Instead of that, however, I found Betty in a wonderful state of excitement, and utterly oblivious of her aches and pains.

"Ah, Miss Winnie," she said, "I'd a'most made up my mind to put on my wrops, and make bold to go and see you this morning."

"It is very fortunate you did not, Betty," I replied; "it would just have killed you."

"Bless you, Miss," exclaimed Betty, with wonderful hilarity; "I don't feel as if nothing would kill me to-day! I've had such good news! such blessed news! My poor boy—my little lad Charlie—is coming home! He's not dead; it was all false about his death! And he has wrote me the most beautiful letter—from London, Miss! and he may come here to-morrow! Ah, I don't want to die now!"

"Not want to go to Heaven, Betty, and live with your daughter?"

"No, Miss, nor I don't care about the cottage, nor the pig, nor nothing, now my little lad is coming back!"

I was puzzled. All the years that I had known Betsey, I had never heard of this "little lad," never heard that she had a son. I asked her what she meant.

"Well, Miss, I may tell now, and it will be a comfort to have it off my mind. All my children died except two—my poor gal, and my little Charlie. My gal was a good gal; but my poor boy went wild, and 'listed, and went abroad to the Ingies, and his letters got fewer and fewer, and at last I heard that he had robbed his master—his captain, I think—and deserted. And then he was caught, and branded for a deserter. After a many years his regiment came back; so I got a friend to write, to know what had become of my lad, and learnt that he was—was——."

Poor Betty could not get on for weeping. The mere recollection of her former trouble, groundless though it had been, sufficed to unnerve her. How the poor soul must have suffered under her quiet sorrow.

"Ah, Miss! it was so hard to have lost my little Charlie, and to think he'd died in his sins, and that I should never—never see him no more! I bore up till my poor gal died, and that a'most broke my heart. I used to lie in bed of a night, when the wind was blowing around, and the sleet driving against the window, thinking of my dear gal, praying the Lord to take me to her! But He knew best; He knew that my boy was alive, and repentant, and coming back to his 'dear old mother;' there's his words, Miss, if you'll please to read his letter."

I could not help remembering Mr. Pinchley's sermons, and his many denunciations of the vices and short-comings of the poor, levelled at this crushed and suffering woman.

The letter, blotted in the writing, and further blotted and blistered in the reading, ran thus:—

"My dear old Mother,

"I'm coming back to you to comfort your declin ears. i'm umbly grateful for all mercys wich is beyond my dessert dear mother i ope you will able to spear a shak down and a mossul of bread for

"Your dutiful son

"Charles Lake.

"i inclose my adress—a answer will oblige and so no more from

"Yours truly."

"I've wrote to him, Miss, to 'come back to his dutiful mother,' and he shall have my room, and I shall sleep in here on the sofa your good 'pa gave me. Oh! it's happy times again!"

"I am so glad, Betty," I replied, "and so very, very sorry for all your troubles. Why did you not tell us about Charlie before this?"

"I couldn't, Miss; I was ashamed to tell anyone how my poor lad had behaved. I couldn't bear they should think ill of him; so I held my tongue. But I never forgot him. I never forgot his sweet pretty face. He and master Ben are as like as two peas, Miss. You wouldn't know them apart. Master Ben has given me many a heartache, reminding me of my Charlie."

This was most interesting to me; I was prepared to like Charlie very much. Soon after, I took my leave, and, full of my news, went straight home, forgetting all about the cold, in thinking of poor Betty's past troubles, and present joy.

Ben received the news with the greatest enthusiasm, and was for starting instantly to see old Betty, and tell her how glad he was; but Dr. Gillias's orders were peremptory, and Ben submitted with his usual sweet patience.

CHAPTER VI.

"I HAVE witnessed the return of the prodigal," said Mr. Gascoign, as he came in the next day.

"Charlie Lake?" asked Ben.

"How did his mother bear it?" asked Mamma.

"I am glad he has come," from Father.

"Is he like Ben?" from me.

"Please don't ask any more questions, I implore," laughed the Rector, in mock distress. "I will answer you all in succession.

"Yes, Charlie Lake, Ben. His mother could do nothing but hug him to death, and sob, 'my boy! my boy!' I thought he did not seem either very grateful or very much affected, Helen. I don't think him *much* like Ben, Winnie."

Our enthusiasm was damped. Something in Mr. Gascoign's manner disappointed us.

"You don't like him, I can see," said our father.

"I certainly do not," he gravely answered.

"Why, Gerald?" asked our mother.

"His appearance is most repulsive."

"Then he can't be like Ben," I cried.

"About as much like Ben as you are like Betty Lake."

"I'm so sorry," I exclaimed.

"What is he like, then?" asked our father.

"He is a low-browed, bull-necked, broken-nosed fellow, with high cheek bones, and a ferocious expression. Altogether, his appearance is ruffianly."

A dead blank fell upon us all. At last mamma asked, "Is Betty disappointed?"

"Not in the least. Of course I came away at once; but I heard her say, 'I shouldn't have known you, my boy, you are that changed!'"

"You were there when he arrived?" asked Father.

"Yes, talking quietly with Betty. Suddenly she flew to the door, crying, 'My boy! he's a-coming!' and there he was coming up the path. He at once filled me with a feeling of repulsion—'gave me a turn,' as poor Betty would say."

"I am dreadfully disappointed," said mamma; "but perhaps he may not be a bad man after all. His repulsive

appearance may be the natural result of a former vicious life. Evil passions do leave their impress, you know."

"I don't agree with you, Helen, as to his being a reformed character, if his whole appearance is so repulsive," said our father. "I fear, from Gerald's impression, that the man has not reformed."

"But, Papa dear," I urged, "is it not a good sign, his remembering his poor mother after so many years, and coming back to her?"

"Yes, that appears to be in his favour, certainly," said our father.

"Perhaps he had some motive of which we know nothing," said Mr. Gascoign. "I only know I feel entirely incredulous as to his penitence at the present time."

"But can't you give any other reason than a mere impression?" pleaded our mother.

"Yes," replied the Rector; "his utter indifference of manner as he approached the house. He came along, with a hand in one pocket, and a filthy pipe in his mouth. He wore a greasy velveteen, short, cut-away coat, a plush waistcoat, knee-breeches, and thick boots, laced above the ankle. He had a fur cap upon his head, and his thick bull neck was encircled by a knotted handkerchief. He looked more like a burglar than anything else. He was followed by an evil-looking bull-dog, the image of himself."

"Poor Betty!" sighed Ben; "I'm afraid he won't be a comfort to her."

"So the Pinchleys come to-morrow?" asked the Rector, as if to change the subject.

"Yes," said Ben, "and Uncle Dick the next day. Oh! how jolly!"

"—To have Mr. Pinchley here?" asked Mr. Gascoign, rather wickedly.

"Oh no, no!" cried Ben. "To have Uncle Dick. He is such grand fun! He laughs at everything. You can't be dull, with him in the house."

"Poor little boy!" I heard papa ejaculate, as if to himself. Though Ben had never complained of being mewed-up in the house, his little speech had betrayed how he had missed his usual out-door pursuits, and the change of ideas they brought. Dear father's gaze continued to rest unconsciously upon his darling, with an intense, yearning expression that

made me tremble. Did he think? Our mother must have noticed papa's look, for she said to Ben—

"You must be very careful to do all that the doctor tells you, darling. Then you will soon be well again, and able to go out snow-balling and skating."

"Jolly!" exclaimed Ben. "Win, *won't* we snow-ball Uncle Dick?"

"I am afraid I must not snow-ball, now that I am past sixteen," I said, glancing towards Mamma.

"It is not a very *feminine* amusement," observed Mr. Gascoign.

"Then I won't," I replied; "I will look on, Ben dear."

"I'll snow-ball for Winnie," said the Rector.

"All right," Ben cheerfully replied; "and Papa and Mamma, and Winnie,will look on. (*Won't* I give old Pinchley a 'warmer' too!)" he whispered to me.

At my mother's suggestion, I had written to Aunt Jemima, to express my sorrow for all my former misconduct, especially my rudeness towards her and Mr. Pinchley, to whom I sent my "love!" and whom I named "Uncle." It was rather bitter to me to do this; but I thought I owed it to him and to her. In reply, I had received the following letter from Aunt Jemima:—

"My Dear Winnie,

"My husband says, that the first step towards amendment is repentance; but that they who have sinned must not expect to have their penitence at once believed in. He says, that he cannot yet accord a full measure of belief in your *permanent* reformation; time only, he says, must prove that. Meanwhile, he will endeavour to give you credit for your good intentions, and will remember you in his prayers.

"My husband unites with me in love to your parents and Benjamin, compliments to Miss Parsons, and best wishes to yourself. "Believe me,

"Your sincere well-wisher,

"Jemima Pinchley."

This letter aroused all my worst feelings. For the moment, all my former pride and temper surged up in my heart, drowning my good resolves. For that brief time, I was the Winnie of old days. All my struggles, all my tears and regrets seemed wasted. I felt indignant—furious.

"To think," I said to myself, "that this wretched man, who is no Christian at heart, but a hypocrite, even to himself, a bully, a tyrant, wherever he meets with submission, a mean, cringing coward, where he is opposed—to think that he should dare——."

I was interrupted by the sound of Ben's cough in the next room. Wondering whether he had his medicine at hand, I went in to him, with the traces of disturbance still on my face. Ben had just taken his drops, and his cough had ceased. He looked up when I entered, and at once saw that something was the matter.

"Oh Winnie darling, what is it?" he asked.

I showed him Aunt Jemima's letter. His face flushed over in a moment, and his brow contracted. Then he had a little struggle with himself, and said,—

"We *must* forgive him, dear."

"I know we must, Ben," I answered; "but, oh! I am so dreadfully angry!"

"So am I," said Ben; "but for all that, we must forgive him, you know. I think he is our 'thorn in the flesh,'" and he smiled. "Why shouldn't *we* have 'our thorn in the flesh,' just as everyone else has?"

"*Everyone*, dear?" I said. "Do you think *everyone* has 'a thorn in the flesh?'"

"I do, indeed," he said, rather sadly.

"Now, what is Mamma's 'thorn in the flesh?'" I smiled.

"I am afraid we have been," he replied; "and now that the thorn is less sharp, perhaps Papa's illness may be the thorn."

I sighed, "Indeed, yes! But before that?—Do you think Mamma had any before that?"

"Don't you remember, how she said she had to struggle against her *uncertain* character—a sort of weakness—not doing the right thing exactly when it was most wanted; putting off, and taking things easily, you know."

"Ah, yes, I daresay that was a very sharp thorn. But what is Papa's thorn, do you think?"

"I don't know. Perhaps, not being able to get about as he used to do, and feeling so weak and nervous. We used to be his thorn."

"Yes, indeed!" I sighed. "Ben, I suppose these 'thorns' are sent to prevent our being too fond of life. If all were happiness, without any drawback, we should never think of God, or wish for heaven."

"I am sure we should not," said Ben. "But what *can* be Mr. Gascoign's 'thorn in the flesh?'"

"I should think his 'thorn' is, that he is always trying to make people good, and meeting with disappointment."

"Yes, that's his 'thorn,' depend upon it," said Ben.

And so we went on, speculating on everybody's "thorn in the flesh," down even to the little gardener boy, whose thorn, we decided, must be *work*, for he was an idle little fellow. This discussion served to distract us from the matter in hand, so that our indignation against Mr. Pinchley quite cooled down. Then Ben re-read the letter.

"After all, Winnie, we treated him shamefully, you know! We made him look ridiculous in the eyes of his lady-love. Oh! that sooty shower!"

Ben was trying not to laugh. I did not feel inclined.

"Well, they looked equally ridiculous," I replied, "though I think they were both too angry to think of that. But we did behave disgracefully."

"It is really not surprising that he can't quite forget it, is it, Winnie?"

"No, of course not, dear; and he still thinks of me as I was then, before dear mamma had taken such pains to make me better."

"Let us read the letter again," said Ben. "Perhaps we shall not feel angry, when we read it in a new light."

"Why?" exclaimed Ben, glancing at the bottom of the page, where Aunt Jemima had signed her name, "here is a little 'T.O.' There's something more."

So we turned over, and there was a little postscript, written in pencil by Aunt Jemima, evidently very hurriedly.

"MY POOR WINNIE. I can't help thinking you *are* a good girl now, and are really sorry for the past. I cannot forget that you are my brother's child, and that I brought you up. I shall always love you, dear."

"P.S.—My husband does not know that I have added this postscript. He is a man of such strict principles, and sets his standard of goodness so high, that he abhors everything approaching to sin, and cannot easily excuse the sinner. I, alas! am full of imperfection, unworthy to sit at his feet."

"Poor Aunt Jemima!" I exclaimed.

"Pinchley is *her* 'thorn in the flesh!'" said Ben.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Pinchleys arrived next day. Mr. Pinchley shook hands demonstratively with papa and mamma, blandly with Ben, and frigidly with me. Aunt Jemima kissed Ben tenderly, but only shook hands with me, though a silent pressure told me that her husband's presence was the barrier to a kiss. When she was alone with me, however, she made up for it. Aunt Jemima had changed very much indeed. She had a careworn, patient, frightened expression, and a habit of constantly appealing to her husband. It was, "Don't you think so, Anselm?" or, "Am I right, Anselm?" or "What do you think, Anselm?" at every moment, and when he was in the room, her eyes almost constantly sought his face, with a curious mixture of fear, admiration, and affection. I thought it bored him; for once or twice he spoke to her quite snappishly. Poor Aunt Jemima!

But Uncle Dick arrived the next day; dear, kind, hearty, genial Uncle Dick, who set himself against everything crabbed or unkindly, and was the direct antipodes to poor Mr. Pinchley. Uncle Dick immediately dubbed Mr. Pinchley "the knight of the rueful countenance;" for Mr. Pinchley, having budded into the dignity of Vicar, and being able to exercise unlimited small authority in his own parish, had dropped his suave blandishing manners, and his flourishing bow; though his bending walk, having been the habit of years, still clung to him in a measure.

Uncle Dick delighted in "demolishing his dignity," as he said, by accosting him with the utmost familiarity, and assailing all his pet prejudices with a good-tempered hilarity there was no combating. One day Mr. Pinchley lost his temper to such an extent, that Uncle Dick said, "My dear fellow, it's of no use for anyone to quarrel with me! I never quarrel with anyone! I'm too good-tempered, you know. I never feel offended—never! You may insult me as much as you please, and I shan't mind it."

Now, this must have been dreadfully aggravating to Mr. Pinchley. I suppose few things are more aggravating to an ill-tempered man, than to find that his temper affords amuse-

ment to the person he wishes to annoy. I could see that he was sometimes ready to scream with impotent fury; yet he had no redress, for any unwonted expression of ill-temper only provoked a roar of laughter from Uncle Dick. The latter did not seek to irritate Mr. Pinchley, however; but when he was ill-tempered without a cause, he considered him a fit subject for baiting.

The day after Uncle Dick's arrival, we all went out, except poor Ben and Papa, to see Mrs. Lake and her returned prodigal.

As we tapped at the door, a horrid deep growl from within, betokened the presence of the evil-looking bull-dog. The growl of the dog was echoed by one from his master, and accompanied by a kick which sent him yelping into a corner of the room, where he cowered, shewing the whites of his eyes to us, but not daring to make further demonstration in his master's presence.

The moment I glanced at "Charlie," I felt that Mr. Gascoign had rather understated than exaggerated his account of that person's appearance, which was fearfully repulsive. I instinctively fell back into the rear, where Mr. Pinchley still remained, in fear of the dog. Old Betty rose; not so her son, who remained seated, with his pipe in his mouth, staring rather insolently at us. My mother must have felt disgusted, but she only said, "This is your son, Betty?"

"Yes ma'am, my beautiful boy, come back to be a comfort to his poor old mother. Now make your obedience, Charlie my man," said poor Betty, treating him like the little boy she no doubt fancied him.

There was a mixture of defiance and apprehension, blended with the man's insolent manner, as he replied, "We don't want any tract women and psalm-singers here! We want to live quiet, and keep our 'ome to ourselves—we do."

"Why Charlie, this be the Rector; and this lady and young lady be the Squire's lady and daughter! And the other gentleman and lady be all part of the Squire's family!" pleaded poor old Mrs. Lake, quite aghast at her Charlie's rudeness.

"Oh well, I've no objection to the Squire and his family," said Charlie, relenting; "My service to you, ladies and gents."

So saying he laid aside his pipe, and rose. Evidently he

thought it well to be on good terms with the Squire and the "Parson;" for he began, in his brute fashion, to apologise.

"And asking your pardon, ladies and gents; but I'm a rough sort of fellow, and my bark's worse than my bite. The old 'oman here knows that—dont 'ee mother?"

"That I do, you poor little chap!" exclaimed Betty.

We did not stay long; we were too much cast down at the sight of "Charlie," besides being stifled by the smell of stale tobacco smoke in Betty's once sweet clean little room. We felt very sad; but Uncle Dick soon aroused us by his absurd remarks about the "beautiful boy," "so like Master Ben," etc., etc.

And on reaching home the whole scene was recapitulated for the edification of Papa and Ben, who, however vexed on poor old Betty's account, could not help laughing at Uncle Dick's absurd comments.

Mr. Pinchley laughed not, however; he was "up in the clouds," as Uncle Dick said, and cogitating profoundly. At last he spoke: "I really think, Jemima, that your laughter is ill-timed," he said, with withering emphasis, attacking the only person who was in his power.

Poor Aunt Jemima coloured up to the roots of her hair, and her eyes filled with tears, but she said not a word; only she at once assumed an expression of imperturbable gravity. Uncle Dick could not keep quiet.

"Yea, of a truth, we will be grave, oh most timeous reprehender!" he said, with a preternatural gravity, that sent us all off into fits of laughter. There was no resisting the absurd grotesqueness of Uncle Dick's face, when he was struck by a sense of the ridiculous. Mr. Pinchley was infuriated. He never coloured, except when he was very angry, then he turned either white or red. He became of the latter colour now, as he exclaimed, "I suppose, Mr. Richard Travers, I have the right to correct my own wife?"

"Yes, my dear fellow—yes, of course, of course; and I have the right—being a free-born Britisher—to make any comment I please. But really you mustn't be angry with Jemima. Be angry with me—I don't mind it, you know—not a bit, my dear fellow; but perhaps she may; and that makes all the difference."

"I consider——" began Mr. Pinchley.

"Ah that's wrong, my dear fellow! I never consider—

never. No good ever comes of considering. Makes a fellow the colour of a lob-worm, to be always considering. Laugh, my dear fellow—laugh, and grow fat, as *I* do!"

And here the incorrigible Uncle Dick went off into one of his irrepressible fits of laughter, which always made the tears run down his cheeks, and were so infectious, that it was the most difficult thing in the world to help joining him.

"What is a lob-worm?" asked Ben, in all innocence.

It was a most unfortunate question. Uncle Dick could not resist replying, "A creature—an elongated, crawling, wriggling, slippery, unpleasant creature, of greenish complexion, used by fishermen as bait."

And then he went off again into one of his prolonged fits of laughter.

Mr. Pinchley was dreadfully wroth. "Really—really—Mr. Richard, your remarks are highly——"

"Personal? Nay, nay, I'm sure you can't think that, my dear fellow! You mustn't be angry you know; anger stops digestion, makes people thin and bilious. Besides, no one is ever angry with *me*. It's of no use—not the least! *I* am never angry, never was, never shall be?"

Mr. Pinchley arose, and left the room.

"Oh, Richard!" said Aunt Jemima. reproachfully.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE cold set in that Christmas, with such extreme rigour, as to prove a barrier to the festivities which had been planned in honour of the Pinchleys' visit. One or two dinner parties had been given and accepted; but after that, the snow lay so deep, and the frost was so pitilessly hard, that the idea of going out at night, even though smothered up in wraps, with carriage rugs, hot bottles, and foot muffs to any amount, could not be entertained for a moment.

There was great distress amongst the poor for miles round, so many being thrown out of work by the terrible frost. In our parish, they were seen to; yet even there, idleness was not allowed to plead poverty. They who, while they could work, had worked gladly, and done their best for themselves and their families, had the first claim to assistance when they really required it. Illness, of course, gave all an equal claim upon our sympathies.

I have not hitherto made mention of our friends or neighbours. During the few months whose history formed the first part of this story, our childish interests were concentrated in each other. We did not care for the society of children of our own age, in fact, condemned them as "slow;" and their parents, as we found afterwards, had discouraged any intercourse between their children and us, because they considered us "fast." Thus, we had no young friends, nor did we desire them; we were all in all to each other. Aunt Jemima's interests had all centred in the Curate and in parish work, and she did not care for anything else, save that occasionally she gave little tea parties to a select number of old ladies, whose society was pleasing to her, because they chanted the praises of Mr. Pinchley. My father's love of reading, and of quiet home pleasures, rendered him very remiss in acknowledging his friends' attentions. So, on the whole, there had been little intercourse between the Elms and the neighbouring families. The Rector and his sister, however, had visited freely and sociably in the society of the neighbourhood; and when Miss Gascoign married, her friends flocked around her in her new home; but our father's delicate state of health rendered much society an impossibility for the present. Thus our social circle was necessarily very limited.

"Winnie," Mamma said one day, while we were sitting in her little sanctum over our needlework, "as soon as this hard weather breaks up, I shall ask Maggie Thessiger to pay us a visit."

"Oh! why, Mamma?" I cried, in dismay.

"In the first place, my dear, you ought to have the society of girls of your own age."

"I don't want it, Mamma dear."

"You ought to want it, child."

"But I have Ben, Mamma. Who could be so nice as Ben?" I pleaded.

"Ben is a little darling; but he is a boy, and much younger than you in years and temperament. You can learn nothing from Ben."

"But I can learn everything from you, much better than from a girl," I persisted.

"Another thing, Winnie—your interests are too entirely concentrated in your home."

"Is not that right, Mamma?"

"Most right and natural, and proper, up to a certain point, dear; beyond that point, it degenerates into selfishness. It costs you nothing, to devote yourself to those you love."

"But, Mamma, I feel, that even if I did not love you and papa, and Ben, so very dearly, I still *ought* to give you all my time and thoughts, because I have done you all so much harm."

"But *would* you, dear, in that case?"

I mused, and then sighed, "No, I am afraid I should not."

"Another thing, dear Winnie—you may not always have your papa and Ben and me with you."

"Oh! then I should die!" I exclaimed.

"No, child; you would have to live, if God choose that you should. But I will not dwell upon that supposition; it is too sad."

"Oh Mother? You don't think that Papa—that Ben——."

"Your papa's health is very, very precarious," she faltered.

So this was the reason she had of late looked so sad, so careworn.

"Does Dr. Gillias think so?" I asked.

"Yes, he is anxious about him."

"What does he say is the matter?"

"He says, that your papa ought to have gained more strength before this; instead of which, he is weaker. His heart is very feeble, and his nervous system much shaken."

"Oh Mother, tell me the truth! Was it the railway accident that did all this?"

"Dr. Gillias says so," she replied, very softly.

"Then it is my doing; and if Papa dies, I shall have killed him," I sobbed.

"No darling," replied my mother, taking me in her arms; "as well might I say, that it is *my* doing; since, but for my marriage with him, he would probably have been safe at home when that accident occurred. Besides, strangely enough it happened, that there was another railway accident the very next day, on the line of rail upon which we should have been travelling had we not been summoned home. Perhaps we should not have escaped even so well as we did."

I was a little comforted. "Then," I said, following up a line of thought, "both you and Papa might have been dreadfully injured. You would not have been allowed to read Mrs. Thatcher's telegram, owing to which you came with Dr. Gillias; and so, my Ben would have died! And I——." I shuddered at the picture in my own mind.

"It is all quite possible," replied my mother. "Therefore, how unwise to say 'it is my fault'—'it is all my doing,' when we think that the consequences of some action of ours will be very sad indeed. We are so short-sighted. We forget, that every little thing we do, is just one link in the long chain of a life time. Take away that one little link, and the whole course of events would be altered. Depend upon it, 'whatever is, is best.'"

"Oh Mamma, how could it be for the best, if Papa were to die?"

"Perhaps not for *us*, dear; but surely, for *him*."

"Why?"

"If he were taken from us, it would be, that he might be spared some terrible pain of mind or body, in the future."

"Oh Mamma, I could not think so, if he died!"

"You would *feel* it so, one day, my child."

"But I should never see the reason, dear Mother; not in this world, I mean; and it is such sad, weary waiting, till we see God's reasons in the next!"

"We generally can see God's reason for afflicting us, even in this life, if we choose to look for it, my dear."

Oh how I remembered her words, one day, when I sat in a darkened room, and my tears refused to flow, and my heart seemed turned to ice; when all that made life dear, had passed away, and I was alone! alone!

And then, "seeing God's reason," was the only comfort that I had!

CHAPTER IX.

IT had been snowing for three days, and the snow lay several feet deep, and still it froze hard notwithstanding. The fields were one white mass, without divisions or boundaries, for the hedges were buried in the snow, save here and there, where a taller growing shrub than the rest, or a tree, would show itself. The cattle had all been brought under shelter; but some had perished in spite of the utmost care. All communication with the cottages was at first cut off for us; though each cottager had, with the help of the neighbours, cleared a pathway to the main road. There the snow would have rendered passage impossible, had not the neighbouring families amongst the gentry, at last agreed to pay the working men so much a day for keeping the roads clear. So the men were constantly shovelling up the snow into high banks on each side of the road. For the most part they gladly hailed the offer of work; but a few of the drones remained indoors, or else sauntered out to watch the workers. These men had a sullen look, and a slouching gait. With their hands in their pockets, and black pipes for ever in their mouths, they either scowled on the workers, or jeered at them.

Mr. Gascoign, Uncle Dick, and a few gentlemen of the neighbourhood, had one day been helping the men at their work, and the two came in, looking as warm and comfortable as though the thermometer stood at temperate, instead of much below freezing.

"And all the time I was working like some galley-slave," said Uncle Dick, "my ears were all agog for the first luncheon bell. As soon as I heard it, down went my shovel, and off I cut. Ah Helen, if you want to feel as if you could eat an ox whole, go and dig with those fellows!"

"I am not at all anxious to know what it feels like," replied our mother, laughing, as she led the way to the dining-room, whither Mr. Pinchley had already betaken himself. He felt the cold acutely, and passed the whole of his time, huddled over the fire in his great coat, with collar pulled up over his ears, and buttoned from top to bottom.

"Ah ha! Sir Knight! I perceive that thou art rueful of the ruefullest!" cried Uncle Dick, regarding the shivering

object before him. "Come out after luncheon, man, and help us to shovel away the snow, and you'll feel too hot for that great coat!"

"I wish you would not slap me so hard on the shoulder," peevishly replied poor Mr. Pinchley.

"Well, I won't. But do come out with us, Pinchley," urged Uncle Dick, very kindly.

"I fail to see, that a clergyman's mission is to dig and delve amongst navvies. It is for him to administer to their soul's need," replied Mr. Pinchley, loftily, and in great disgust.

"Oh! if you talk of 'missions,' I'm done!" said Uncle Dick; "my 'mission' is to demolish as much of this cold turkey and ham, as I can conveniently stow away. Ah, thank you, Helen."

"I'm anxious about the poor fellows," said Mr. Gascoign, who had sat down with us.

"But this road cleaning will keep them going pretty well, till the thaw comes," Papa replied.

"Oh, it's not that," pursued Mr. Gascoign; "but—Dick, don't you notice how the non-workers seem to clog the energies of the others,—to act as a sort of damper?"

"Yes, I do," replied Uncle Dick; "and I notice too, that those surly fellows haven't a finger to touch their cap with, to their betters."

"Yes, I have observed that," assented the Rector. "That would not signify though, were it not a symptom of something that lies deeper."

"What do you suppose?" asked our father.

"There has been a good deal of disaffection and discontent amongst the working classes, all over the country, of late; and the ill-conditioned turbulent fellows, who fancy themselves patriots, and are always ready to shew off their tub-eloquence to the mob, are of course ready to seize upon the occasion. I hear that one of those tub-orators—a low chartist fellow—is in one of the neighbouring towns; so we may have a visit from him here. Some of our men have been away to hear him hold forth. It has done them no good, poor fellows!"

"If he comes here, I shall confront him," valiantly exclaimed Mr. Pinchley.

"I hope he will not come here," replied the Rector. "The poor are hard pressed now. What with want of work, want of food, and sickness, they are much to be pitied. It

would be very sad, if this man were to knock from under them the surest stay they have,—trust in God, and hope of better times."

"I shall refute him! I shall shew the misguided people that the path of duty is the path of peace—aye, and of prudence too; for how can the poor stand without the rich?"

Mr. Pinchley was trying to goad himself into eloquence. Aunt Jemima uttered a murmur of admiration.

"Well, I fancy they could do without us just about as well as we could do without them," said Papa.

"You and Gascoign are levellers," was Mr. Pinchley's reply.

"When the frost breaks up, Helen, and you can get out again to visit the cottages," pursued Mr. Gascoign, "you will certainly find a change. Some evil influence is at work. There is nothing one can take hold of at present; but in spite of all one may do, there seems to be a want of geniality, a want of responsiveness, which betokens that mischief is brewing."

"But what do you fear, Gerald?"

"I fear that the men will desert the cottage for the alehouse, that the women and children will be ill-treated and starved. That is the usual thing."

"Where is your faith?" asked Mr. Pinchley. Aunt Jemima's eyes hung upon him in fond admiration.

"Faith?" echoed Mr. Gascoign, rather hastily. "You might as well say to me, when a mad dog is approaching the village, 'don't trouble yourself. Have faith that he won't bite the people!' Or you might as well say, when a house is on fire and a family asleep in it, 'Don't break open the door, or go up through the window to save them. Have faith that they will not be burnt to death?'"

"But surely," murmured Miss Parsons, "no one is going to be burnt to death?"

"It is not a parallel case," said Aunt Jemima. "Do you think so, Anselm?"

"I certainly fail to see how Gascoign's speech bears upon the argument," replied her husband, with lofty contempt.

"Now," said Uncle Dick, "I am surprised that you don't ask *me* for a definition of the word 'faith'; but here it is. I have faith, that if I jump into a pond, I shall get wet. I have faith, that if Ben chop off his nose with this knife, it will bleed.

I have faith, that if I eat any more of this plum pudding, I shall be very ill indeed."

Mr. Pinchley looked indignant; but we all laughed, more at Uncle Dick's manner, than at his words. Mr. Gascoign, however, soon looked grave again, and continued——,

"I think, Helen, if you and Winnie could go out in the sleigh, you might be able to do some good amongst the wives, and they might influence their husbands."

"Then we will go," said Mamma, "and this very afternoon. Is the road to the villiage quite clear?"

"Quite, thanks to *me*," said Uncle Dick. "I'll drive you. Perhaps *I* may be able to influence the poor people?" These words were accompanied by a comical grimace which set us all laughing, except Mr. Pinchley and Aunt Jemima.

"If you have room, I will go too, with pleasure," proposed Mr. Pinchley; "the presence of a clergyman—a—a——"

"Oh no—pray don't go, Anselm," urged Aunt Jemima. "If the people are dangerous, and disposed to be insolent to their betters, it would surely be a needless tempting of Providence! A life so valuable as yours——."

"Seek not to dissuade me," was the lofty reply. "When the path of danger is the path of duty, in that path will I walk!"

When Mr. Pinchley was laying down the law, he fancied himself in the pulpit, closed his eyes, swayed his body, made a motion with his arms as though swimming, and now and then thumped his fist upon the table. He did so now, as he rose to accoutre himself for the anticipated fray.

"Great soul! Great soul!" murmured Aunt Jemima.

"'Great fool! Great fool!' did she say?" whispered Uncle Dick to me.

Ben heard, and was going to laugh. I "saved the situation," by asking our mother whether I should put on my things. She rose, and we both went to equip ourselves. Before long we started.

It snowed no longer, but everywhere, as far as we could see, lay a dazzling white expanse. The sky was of a cold steel colour. The air was bitterly keen. But the horses trotted along briskly, and jingled their sleigh bells as if they enjoyed the cold; and we felt rather exhilarated. Only Mr. Pinchley, buttoned up to the ears, and wrapped in mufflers innumerable, looked blue and frozen, and the tip of his nose was of a ripe purple. He was wretched beyond description.

We had resolved to call at the cottages, just as they lay in our way, and as the first was Betty Lake's, we went in there.

Poor old Betty was sadly changed from what she had been. She was sitting over the fire, waiting till her "cup o'tea," which was brewing on the hob, should be ready. The poor soul arose as we entered, and did her best to welcome us. After answering her inquiries as to the health of the Squire, and "Master Ben," our mother asked after "Charlie." "Ah! poor lad, he do feel the cold awful!" replied Betty. "He's forced to lie abed to keep warm, ma'am."

"Why doesn't he go out and work with the other fellows?" asked Uncle Dick. "Work would soon warm him."

"Ah, poor little lad! he's that delicate, you'd never believe sir," said Betty. "He say's he's weak in his chest in the cold weather. I couldn't bear to lose him, now!"

"Would he like me to read a chapter to him, or to expound —a—a— ?" asked Mr. Pinchley.

"Thanking you kindly sir," replied Betty; "he said he'd try and sleep a little, and I wasn't to let nobody come a'nighst him to disturb him."

"Is the poor little fellow a comfort to you?" asked Uncle Dick.

"Ah yes, Sir. He's that good and 'umble and consid'rate. He says to me this morning, 'Now mother, don't you be giving me any hot soup to warm me—don't you think of it, mother,' he says. 'There's not enough for two, and I don't feel that ill, but what maybe I'll pull through.'"

"Did you give him the soup?"

"Yes, Sir; I told him I was that troubled with the bile, through eating too much, that I couldn't abide the soup. So then he took it. And last night he said, 'I feel that took with ague, that if I knew any lad as would run to the public for some brandy, I'd give him a penny,' he said."

"Did you find a lad?" asked Uncle Dick, with much interest.

"Well no, Sir, I couldn't. But I thought a little fresh air would do me good; so I got it for him. It did him a power of good, Sir. He can't abide spirits; but he says his doctor ordered him to swallow some every day, for the sake of his nerves. He mostly sits by the fire. He does'nt care for going out. Twice he has been to Walsham, to a tea-meeting there."

"Does he say anything about the man who is preaching

there, and trying to make the poor people discontented and disorderly?"

"He has heard tell of him, Sir; but he says them things is no affair of his."

"Well, good-bye, Betty," said my mother; and we left; not, however, before I had seen Uncle Dick slip something white and shining into Betty's hand.

Then we went on to the other cottages, where we found much cause for anxiety. Some of the men were at home, slouching over the fire. A few rose as we entered, and made a show of civility. Some left the cottage. One or two never greeted us at all, but sat, with the same sullen air, before the fire.

The wives had mostly an aspect of anxiety and weariness, and appeared glad to see Mr. Gascoign and Mamma, and to unfold their troubles to them.

"Well, times *is* bad, to be sure, ma'am," said one; "but you and the Squire, and Mr. Gascoign, makes it as light as it can be made in *this* parish. I've heard tell, though, that at Beales the poor folks are a'most starving. There's no work going, nor won't be till the frost breaks up. The men are all having meetings, to know what's to be done. They say the rich is too hard upon the poor, and that God made us all alike, and didn't mean the poor man to starve."

"Does your husband say that?" asked the Rector.

"Yes; and he's not the same man he was before that Pearson came lecturing and preaching about the country."

"Does Pearson tell the working men that the rich people oppress the poor?"

"Yes, Sir; and I'm feared he won't wait till he gets them out of their work."

"Well, good-day. I will speak to your husband, and try to show him that Pearson is in the wrong."

"Thank you, Sir. He's not the same man, since that Pearson came. There couldn't be a kinder husband, nor a better father, than he was. But now, he'll do nothing but grumble at me, and push the children away, if they goes near him."

As we went from cottage to cottage, much the same tale greeted us, of "hard times" being made the excuse for idleness, discontent, even drunkenness. One or two of the women said, that their husbands were "at the public," gone for "a

drop of something to keep the cold off their stomachs;" and one, who was a decent creature, and had seen better days, added, "But I said to John, how would the men like it, if we took to drink, to keep the cold off *our* stomachs?"

"And what did John say?" asked Mr. Gascoign.

"He said, that it wasn't for women to drink, nor to teach their husbands neither; it was for them to keep a civil tongue in their heads, and obey their husbands, and stop at home and mind the children. But that they all say, since they went to hear Pearson. He's all for the men, and us poor women are nothing, he says—just the lowest part of creation. He says there ought to be no such thing as marriage. He says he can prove it from the Bible."

"Oh, then, he believes in the Bible?" asked Mr. Pinchley.

"Well, Sir, he believes just as much as suits him, from what they tell me. But I *have* heard that he's an infidel at heart."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Pinchley, with a shudder. "I believe there *are* such people; and what a comfort it is, my good woman, to know that they will be consigned to the bottomless pit, and left to burn there for ever, in company with Roman Catholics, Jews, Turks, and perhaps those Dissenters who have seceded from the Church of England. For we are told——." Here Mr. Pinchley closed his eyes, and folded his hands, and was evidently prepared to improve the occasion, had not the Rector interposed.

"Nay, nay, I don't agree with you, Pinchley. I believe it quite possible for all those people you have named, to get to Heaven. But I don't want to discuss the matter now, not having time; only, I will talk it over some day with Mrs. Peters, if she wants to know more about it. But, cheer up!" he said, kindly laying his hand upon the woman's shoulder. "Times will mend. I'll have a talk with my friend John, and set it all right."

"You must trust in the Lord; I am afraid it has come to that!" said Mr. Pinchley.

"Oh dear, I hope it hasn't come to that!" exclaimed Mrs. Peters.

We could hardly keep our countenance; but Mr. Gascoign set it right by saying,

"Mr. Pinchley only means, that he thinks I can do nothing, and that only God can help you. But you know the

good old saying, 'God helps those who help themselves.' God works by means; if He will let me be the means of setting your husband straight, I shall be very glad."

Almost wherever we went, we found the evil effects of Pearson's influence. At last, in the cottage of a Mrs. Jackson, who, with her husband, had lately come to settle, we found a handbill lying on the table. The husband was out—no doubt "at the public." The wife did not seem particularly glad to see us; but we did not mind that. Mr. Gascoign took up the bill, and read it aloud, first courteously asking Mrs. Jackson's permission. It ran thus:—

"NATIONAL HALL OF FREEDOM.
TUESDAY NIGHT.
A LECTURE ON
THE RIGHTS OF MAN.
BY JAMES PEARSON.

MAN'S BIRTHRIGHT.
MAN'S DESTINY.
MAN'S SPHERE.
MAN'S ESTATE.
THE MASTERS.
MARRIAGE.
THE PRIESTS.
WOMEN!"

Just as Mr. Gascoign had finished reading, Jackson came in from the public-house, looking rather flushed.

"What nonsense!" Mr. Gascoign exclaimed, laughingly.

"And *wot's* 'nonsense'?" asked the man, rather offensively.

Mr. Pinchley replied, "For this low ignorant fellow, to presume to set the working classes against their betters."

"And who's our 'betters,' I'd like to know?" retorted Jackson, still more offensively.

"My good man, read your Catechism, and you will know," replied Mr. Pinchley, very loftily.

"And who does it say is my 'betters'? Come now, tell us, Parson?" persisted the man, sticking his head on one side, and winking irreverently.

"Your 'spiritual pastors and masters'!"

"Oh ho! My 'spiritool pastors and masters,' eh? D'ye hear that, Peg?" to his wife.

The woman made no answer; afraid, evidently, to contravene her lord and master's opinion. The man continued, still more abusively——.

"Now, I'll tell you wot it is! I'm a free-born Englishman, I've got a right to my own 'pinion. That's my wife, and if I choose I shall beat her! This in my 'ouse, and if I choose to kick you out, I will!"

Mr. Pinchley retreated a step or two towards the door. Mr. Gascoign stood where he was. Uncle Dick, at sight of Mr. Pinchley's discomfiture, sat down, and roared with laughter, till the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"What are ye larfin at?" asked the man. "I never see such a buffooning little beer-barrel—never!"

"My dear Sir—I'm not laughing at *you*—not a bit of it, I assure you!"

"Oh you're larfin at the parson there? Well, he *do* look queer, *to* be sure!"

And Mr. Jackson smiled a grim smile.

"And I assure you, my dear Sir," pursued Uncle Dick, "that it is of no use for anyone to try and quarrel with me. I never quarrel with anyone—I'm too good-tempered. I always laugh at everything!"

Uncle Dick looked so absurdly good-tempered—so very like a remarkably stout and facetious little bird, that the man, fairly conquered, exclaimed, "Dang it! you're one of the right sort! Shake hands!"

Uncle Dick, wincing slightly, submitted to the proffered token of amity, and then, unable to resist the chance of a joke at poor Mr. Pinchley's expense, said confidentially, "You are a capital fellow! And you mustn't mind our friend there. A little—just a little *touched*, you know!"

"Ah, well!" exclaimed the man.

Mr. Pinchley looked furious. The Rector interposed, and said, "I quite allow that you are a free-born Englishman; but so is your wife a free-born Englishwoman; therefore you have no right to beat her—the law will not allow it. I quite admit that this house is yours so long as you pay your rent, and that neither I nor anyone has the right to enter it against your will. But I deny your right to *kick* me, or anyone, out of it; though I am bound to withdraw, if you desire me to do so, my friend."

Mr. Gascoign spoke so mildly and persuasively, that the man was rather pacified, and said, "But what d'ye want here?"

"I am the clergyman of this parish. You are a new comer, or you would know that I visit all the cottages, and am welcome there."

"Do you come to preach?—to make us out miserable sinners?"

"Certainly not, no more sinners than I am. I don't want to preach to you at all, unless you ask me."

"But the other chap?" he asked, referring to Mr. Pinchley.

"Oh never mind; he has nothing to do with this parish."

"Now you," he continued, addressing poor Mr. Pinchley; "you think us all miserable sinners, if we don't go to church —eh?"

"I certainly do," replied the unfortunate divine, with an attempt at valour.

"Don't mind him," whispered Uncle Dick; "he's mad, you know."

"Ah well, I forgot," said Jackson, nodding very knowingly.

"But you, Parson," he continued, addressing Mr. Gascoign, "do you think I shall go to hell, because I'm not a psalm singer, and I wop Peg there, and I spend my own in the public, and I don't believe in the Bible, and I never mean to repent?"

Mingled with the tone of defiance in this man's words and manner, was a sort of fierce despair, which moved the Rector's pity. He replied, "No, I do not think you are doomed to hell for all that; though I think that if you died suddenly in the midst of such a life as you are now leading, you would not be fit for Heaven, nor happy there."

"Then *wot* do you think will become of me?"

"I hope that you will some day turn over a new leaf; that you will be kind to your wife, cease to drink in the public house, and spend Sunday in a way that will be a very pleasant change and rest, after the week's toil. I think, my friend, trouble has driven you to this."

"That's true enough," said the man, in a different tone altogether. "When the little 'uns was round me, the place were cheerful, like. I didn't care to go to the public then."

"You have lost them?"

"Yes, in the fever—four—all of 'em."

"That is trouble indeed," said the Rector, in a soft sweet voice. "Will you tell me more about it, some day—when we are quite alone—you and I?"

"Yes, Parson, that I will! You speak so feelin' like!" exclaimed Jackson, involuntarily touching his cap. "But you won't bring me them tracts, and palaver about my soul?"

"No, not unless you ask me. I never do. But my man, you should be kind to poor Peg, you know. She has also lost the little ones. Think what *her* grief must be!"

"That's true—that's true—I'll see about it," he replied.

On leaving the cottage, we found that it was freezing harder than ever, and the poor groom, who had kept the horses moving about, looked so dreadfully blue and pinched, that in common charity, we went no further, but turned homewards.

"A very ruffian!" said Mr. Pinchley; "quite ready for any deed of violence. An irreclaimably ferocious brute!"

"I don't think so," replied the Rector, very quietly.

CHAPTER X.

"I SHALL go to the lecture, and refute that Pearson," said Mr Pinchley, the following Tuesday, at luncheon.

"Oh pray, pray Anselm, don't go!" implored Aunt Jemima.

"It is my duty, and I will!" was her husband's emphatic reply.

"Are you quite sure it is judicious?" asked our father.

"Is it a time to consider what is 'judicious,' when one's duty lies plain before one?" was the lofty reply.

"If it is injudicious, it is not a duty," was the response.

"I cannot accept your fine distinctions, Mr. Travers. 'In the strength of the Lord, I will go forth!'"

"Take care that you *do* go 'in the strength of the Lord,'" said Father, very dryly.

"I think I'll go too," said Uncle Dick, "and witness the controversy. It may 'tend to edification'" (this, through his nose).

"It will be a pity if you *don't* refute the man," said our mother.

"Not refute him!" exclaimed Mr. Pinchley, incredulously.

"Oh! Anselm could not fail!" from Aunt Jemima.

Mamma continued. "I have heard that those infidel preachers carry away their hearers in a most wonderful way, and that sometimes when an opponent attempts to overturn his arguments, he—the opponent—is roughly treated by the audience."

"I am ready to go forth unto the battle! I will not flinch! I will sacrifice myself in the cause of truth!" exclaimed Mr. Pinchley.

"And I will go and witness the sacrifice, and take down notes of the controversy," responded Uncle Dick. "When is it to commence, and where?"

"At four o'clock, at Walsham, in the National Hall."

"We'll go together; and we'll walk, or our brains will be frozen, and unfit for the controversy."

And so it was arranged, that the two were to start directly after luncheon, as it was nearly a two hours' walk to Walsham.

When they were gone, Aunt Jemima withdrew to her own room, as she said, "to offer up a petition for the success of her husband's heroic enterprise." We did not laugh after she was gone; we felt it so sad, that she should be so blinded to this man's miserably egotistical character. And yet, was it not better so, as she was tied to him for life? About an hour after the two had left us, Mr. Gascoign came in, for his daily chat with our father. His usually serene brow was somewhat clouded over.

"Anything gone wrong?" asked papa.

"About as wrong as can be," he replied. "Growing discontent everywhere, in spite of all that we do to help them, and, what is much worse, growing infidelity. Some of the men have been listening to Pearson, and have come home primed with his arguments, which are utterly subversive of all order, and calculated to produce deeds of violence. I don't see where it is to end. A few robberies have been committed in the neighbourhood."

"I wondered whether you would go to this meeting," said father.

"I thought it better not to do so. I am waiting till the man attacks our own people here, on our own ground. If I went to Walsham, I should be infringing the rights of Dayrell and Poynter. In general, it is the right thing for every one to do his own work."

"Pinchley is gone," said father.

"Pinchley?"

"Yes; he said it was his duty, and he would go 'in the strength of the Lord,' and refute Pearson."

"How fearfully injudicious! The people are wild about Pearson; and if Pinchley does not act prudently, he will get roughly treated. I must go at once. Is the pony roughed? Can I have him?"

Papa stretched out his hand to ring the bell. "No, no," said the Rector, "I'll go to the stables myself, and get Bob saddled. There is no time to lose. Goodbye, goodbye." And he left.

We little thought what a scene was to follow at Walsham. Mr. Pinchley and Uncle Dick arrived duly at that little town, and immediately repaired to the National Hall, where a number of workmen, navvies, and others, were already assembled, while more were coming in every moment. No women were there;

even if they had wished to attend, they would not have been admitted, they being considered the inferior portion of creation.

Mr. Pinchley and Uncle Dick took their places in the "reserved seats," close to the platform. Soon after, the hall, densely crowded, could hold no more. Then the people became clamorous for the presence of the lecturer, who soon afterwards stepped on to the platform, and was greeted with vociferous applause. He was a short, dark, unwashed looking man, with a thick beard, which appeared never to have been combed. His hands looked fat and flabby, and were likewise apparently unwashed; but he flourished them about while declaiming, and they produced a great effect, in conjunction with an unpleasant looking pocket-handkerchief, with which he frequently wiped his over-heated brow.

As soon as silence was restored, he arose, and began his address. "Men and brothers (thunders of applause), I am here to-day, to talk over a few matters that concern you. I am not going to tell you that you are all going fast to hell; you wouldn't believe me, if I tried to make you think that! I am going to talk sensible—as to men, and not to children or women, who have no comprehension." (Great applause).

"Friends, I propose to divide this lecture into eight parts, namely (as per handbill):—

'MAN'S BIRTHRIGHT.
MAN'S DESTINY.
MAN'S SPEAR.
MAN'S STATE.
THE MASTERS.
MARRIAGE.
THE PRIESTS.
THE WOMEN!'

"Now, first—as to Man's Birthright. What is it, my friends?" The lecturer here paused, and looked round on his audience, as though awaiting an answer. One man said, "May be, work." Another ventured with, "Is it eatin' and drinkin'?"

"No, my brothers. Man's Birthright is to be *free!*—(great sensation)—free to do as he likes, and not to be ground down by rulers and judges, by unjust laws that he never had a hand in making!" (Great applause).

After a good deal more on the subject of Man's Birthright, the orator went on to "Man's Destiny," which, he said "is much the same as his birthright, only quite different," but in what the difference consisted, he did not show. Then came "Man's Spear" (as he pronounced it), which was pretty much the same as his "destiny," "only more extended, like." "'Man's State,'" he said, "might be said to comprise his birthright, his destiny, and his spear; but if it is his natural and proper state, it must be *free*, and not ground down by tyrant rulers—(immense applause)—and priests, and a bloated nobility."

Here the applause was so vociferous, that the lecturer paused, and embraced the opportunity of again applying the unpleasant handkerchief to its before mentioned use. Then he resumed—

"The time is coming, men and brothers, when the working man will have his rights. All men will be equals. One won't have to beg, while another lives on the fat of the land. One won't have to get up of a cold morning, and go out to work on a empty stommic, while another lies abed and takes it warm and easy! No, no, my friends, stand up for your rights! *Take* 'em! Take 'em! or you'll never get 'em at all! (Great sensation, and shouts of 'We will!') The masters and the priests work hand in hand. The master, he grinds down the poor man; and the priest, he says, 'You mustn't murmur. You must submit. You must be content with your lot. You must love your masters, and read your Bibles; and even if you never have nothing but trouble, and want, and wrong, here upon earth, you'll go to Heaven when you die, and wear a golden crown; for the Bible says it!' Oh yes, it's a mighty convenient thing to talk of the Bible! Bible indeed! A lot of fables (which means lies, you know), invented long ago by the priests, to keep down the poor. It's found out now, that the Bible is all translated wrong, just to suit the priests and the rich; and if there ever *was* any truth in the Bible when it was first written (and there's great doubt of that), there's not a word of truth in it now!" (Murmurs of wonderment through the hall, and cries of "Go on!" and "And what about marriage?")

"Marriage, indeed? Just an invention of the priests, to get a hold upon the men through the wives. Women are fools, my friends. They knock under to the priests, and give 'em their money, and tells 'em lies about their husbands. Women!

Why, they forget all that's said of women, even in their fine Bibles! Paul, he advised men not to marry; and he said women were 'to keep silence,' and many another thing he said, that shewed what *he* thought of women! I suppose those bits of the Bible were left in by mistake. Now, you men, when you go home, your wives will overhaul you for coming here; and you'll have to prove that you are men and Britons! If they won't stop their jawing, you just give 'em the strap! Then they'll say they'll tell the parson; and you just say, that if you catch any of those black-coated vermin in *your* house, you'll duck 'em in the horse-pond!"

Amidst the tremendous applause which followed this tirade, a figure, tall, lanky, clad in a long suit of black, arose, and slowly mounting the platform, took its place beside the lecturer. An instant hush followed, by which the new comer profited, to address the audience as follows:—

"Poor, misguided, ignorant, deluded creatures!"

There was a dead silence—the silence of utter and stupified astonishment. It was like the dead hush and stillness, which pervades the air just before a terrific storm. Poor Mr. Pinchley was miserably deceived by this seeming quiet. He thought that the sacred presence of a clergyman, had overawed the tumultuous assembly, and restored them to a proper sense of their accustomed deference to their betters. Rushing on his fate, he continued—

"Poor, ignorant men! I am going to refute all the wretched arguments brought forward by this miserable lost sinner, for your destruction! I am going to tell you that the poor man's lot is *work*, and that he should be thankful when he can get it, and pray for the rich as his benefactors, and——."

But posterity was suddenly and violently defrauded of the brilliant oration which would doubtless have followed. All through the hall there surged a low, fierce sound, "g-r-r-r-r-r-!" not unlike the growl of a savage dog when about to spring. Then arose loud yells, and cries of "Turn him out! Turn him out! Duck him! Duck the canting, psalm singing parson!" The audience rushed, clambered, swarmed, on to the platform, and, seizing the would-be orator, roughly hustled him out of the hall, the rest of the audience following, yelling and shouting like madmen.

"Let me go! Let me go!" screamed Mr. Pinchley; "I didn't mean any harm! On my honour I didn't! I was in

the wrong—mistaken—I see it now! Oh dear! Oh dear! pray don't kill me!"

His terror and distress were so great, as to excite the jeers and laughter of his assailants, who, treating him less roughly, still continued to hurry him along, towards—alas!—the town pump!

"Oh! what are you going to do with me! Oh pray don't hang me!" screamed the wretched divine, his terrified imagination transforming that useful and harmless public institution, into a gibbet.

"Oh no! we aren't going to hang you, parson! We wouldn't be so wicked!" jeered one of the men.

Shouts of laughter greeted this witty sally. Another man added—

"Now here's a chance for you, parson. You just fight it out with Pearson. Here he comes. Now, if you thrash Pearson, the Bible's true, and we'll believe in it. If Pearson thrashes you, the Bible aint true, and we won't believe in it!"

"That's fair," shouted many voices.

"Come on, then," cried Pearson, pulling off his coat.

"Oh no, thank you!" was poor Mr. Pinchley's shuddering reply. "I couldn't think of it—indeed I couldn't! I will go home; and I promise never to interfere with you any more, my dear friends!"

"Ya-a-a-h," shouted the crowd; "then we'll pump on him first, and duck him after!"

The hapless pastor was rudely seized by a dozen men, and laid backwards under the pump. The handle was raised, came down, and a torrent of water drowned his screams, and, filling his mouth, made him choke unpleasantly.

Meanwhile, Uncle Dick, who, from being short and stout, had not been able to force his way through the crowd, had at last come up, and now tried a rescue.

"I say, my men," he exclaimed, panting for breath, "this won't do, you know! I love a good joke as well as the best of you; but you are going too far, and you'll get yourself into trouble. Nay, nay, you mustn't quarrel with me. I never quarrel with anyone, never! I'm too good-tempered. Besides, the poor parson there, is in the wrong; I'll admit that, though he's a friend of mine. He had no business to come and meddle with your affairs ——"

"Then, what did you come for?" asked a man.

"To try and keep him quiet, to be sure! But he wouldn't keep quiet—he's too great a fool! A little touched, you know! a little touched! No furniture in the attics!"

Here Uncle Dick winked so comically, at the same time tapping his forehead with his fore-finger, that, the element of fun predominating over that of ferocity, the mob laughed good-temperedly.

Meanwhile, what with his fright, and what with the shower-bath on this bitter day, Mr. Pinchley was shivering convulsively; his teeth chattered in his head, and his face was ashy pale.

"I'll tell you what, my men," said Uncle Dick, "its no fun, to be freezing here! I should like to warm my blood by racing the parson!"

This proposal was received with shouts of delight. Uncle Dick resumed—

"But, as he has no chance against me (for I'm a good runner, though I'm neither slim nor long-legged), I always give him a hundred yards, and sometimes beat him at that. So, you all stop here, while I take him to that hillock with the big tree on the top of it. I'll come back here, and start when he does."

This idea being approved of, Uncle Dick led Mr. Pinchley to the starting point, and saying, "Now, when I shout 'Off!' you run for your life, and never stop till you get home."

Which was done accordingly. Mr. Pinchley flew as though a mad bull were at his heels; Uncle Dick valiantly competed with him. The mob cheered, and ran after them. But Uncle Dick's sense of the ridiculous soon got the better of him. He began to laugh, could not stop laughing, and at last was fain to subside into the snow by the roadside.

Some of the men stopped, and roared in sympathy; others still followed the terrified fugitive.

All at once, the figure of a man on horseback was seen, advancing towards Mr. Pinchley. They met; the equestrian stopped, and after exchanging somè communication with the clergyman, dismounted, set him on the pony, turned him round, and, bestowing upon its flanks a hearty whack, it started off at full gallop, and was soon out of sight.

"Not fair! Not fair!" roared the disappointed pursuers. "Its no race!"

Uncle Dick could only choke with laughter, and hold his

sides, while the tears streamed down his cheeks. The new comer approached, and stopped when he came up to them.

"Why, what have you been about, my men?" he asked.

"Wot's that to you?" one of the men was beginning. But he was checked by the others, with, "Hush, it's the parson. It's Mr. Gascoign."

"Why Giles—and Bates—and Thomson," he said, looking around upon them, "I did not think any of *our* fellows would have done this!"

"Don't listen to the parson," began Pearson. "He's no better than the other. Duck him! Duck him!"

"Nay, that we won't!" said Giles. "He sat up night after night with my little lad, when he was dying. He's a good friend to the poor, *this* parson is."

"We'll duck you too, Giles, if you cant in that way," said Pearson.

"You just leave our parson alone!" said Johnson. "He kept us all with food from his own kitchen when I was down with the fever. No one shall lay a finger on him, mind!"

The men gathered together in a little knot. The belligerents drew aside, and appeared irresolute, and glanced towards Pearson. Uncle Dick rose, and placed himself beside Mr. Gascoign.

Pearson wavered for a moment; then he advanced suddenly, and struck at the Rector. In an instant, and without any apparent effort, Mr. Gascoign laid him prostrate at his feet.

He had hardly gathered himself up, when the Elmsleigh men were upon him, and began to treat him very roughly.

"No, no, my men; let him go," said the Rector. "He did not hurt me. Let him go."

So Pearson, with an evil look, was about to slink away, when Mr. Gascoign stopped him.

"Now," he said, "tell me, why you are going about from place to place, trying to poison people's minds, and to set them against their best friends?"

"I do it for their good," said Pearson, gaining a little confidence, as he saw that the men were listening attentively.

"Would it be for their good if they refused to work, and rose against their employers, as you have advised them to do?"

"Yes—they'd get better terms."

"Would they? They would get starvation! and, if they proceeded to deeds of lawless violence, imprisonment, or transportation. And if they ceased to believe in a good God, who always does just what is best for them (mind that, my men!—always does what is best for us, though we can't see it at the time, perhaps) if they ceased to believe in Him—why, they would lose their only comfort in trouble."

"Oh ah!" sneered Pearson, "fine talk! But don't you be gulled by him, friends! God isn't good—if He was good, He wouldn't leave the poor man to starve, while the rich man has plenty. He wouldn't let there be any trouble or sickness or pain anywhere—not if He was good."

"Pearson," said Mr. Gascoign, rather sternly, "why does He not strike you dead this minute?"

There was a pause. The Rector resumed—

"*Because* He is good! He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

"That's true, Sir, sure enough," said one of the men; and several of the others muttered "Ay—ay—."

"But I tell you what I will do," pursued Mr. Gascoign. "I invite you to come, this day week, to Elmsleigh, and deliver a lecture in my large schoolroom; and all of you men can come too. You, Pearson, shall bring forward all the arguments you can muster on *your* side of the question, and I will answer them from *my* point of view. I think that's fair, my men?"

"Three cheers for Mr. Gascoign, the poor man's friend!" replied the Elmsleigh men; and, amidst general acclamation, Mr. Gascoign and Uncle Dick walked away.

Occasionally, in any extreme crisis, Uncle Dick could look grave; he did so now.

"He was in the most extreme peril," he said, referring to poor Mr. Pinchley. "The men's blood was up, and they were regular tigers."

"I hope he has not suffered from his shower-bath," said Mr. Gascoign.

"Ah, I took care of that, in giving him such a run!" rejoined Uncle Dick. "Did you ever see such an object? His lanky figure, clad in that long fluttering garment, flying across the snow. His legs looked like a pair of compasses! And when I thought of myself, I fancied I must present the appearance of a flying beer-barrel! When I heard the men

betting on "long legs" and "little 'un" (me!) I couldn't stand it any longer, but rolled over on to the snow. It was fortunate that you came up just then!"

"He won't thank me, for giving the pony such a whack," said Mr. Gascoign.

"Nor me, for making him run," returned Uncle Dick. "I wonder what account he'll give at home?"

The account he did give was, that he had been on the point of refuting Pearson's arguments, when a disturbance arose in the hall; he had been savagely set upon, Uncle Dick had interfered unnecessarily, and, to save himself, had joined with the mob. That he, Mr. Pinchley, thinking the best thing he could do would be to run home and bring help to capture the ringleaders, had started, and meeting Mr. Gascoign, had availed himself of the pony for the purpose.

This account was believed in by no one but Aunt Jemima, who, for many a day, ceased not to laud the brilliant exploit of "her noble, her intrepid Anselm."

"I can picture him to myself, dear," she said to me in confidence, "standing boldly, face to face with the brutal mob, his manly figure reared to its full height,—his eagle eye, flashing scorn and indignation, tempered with a god-like pity, upon his assailants!"

Ah, poor Aunt Jemima! Could she have seen her Anselm, limp and helpless under the pump, and, later, flying for his very life, would her hero have been so exalted in her sight? I trow yes; for Aunt Jemima knew no bounds to her admiration for those she loved to excess. In this case, her blindness was her greatest earthly blessing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE lecture duly took place; and we all attended it, except Ben, who was not yet allowed to go out. Even papa went, well wrapped up. It was most interesting. Mr. Gascoign met all Pearson's arguments with the utmost gentleness and forbearance, completely refuting them one by one. When Pearson had not one more word to say, the meeting broke up, amidst cheers for Mr. Gascoign, 'the Squire,' and everybody and anybody, and growls and hisses for Pearson, who might have received rough treatment, but for the protection of Mr. Gascoign, and some of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who saw him safe out of the parish.

After that, the village became quiet and orderly; the men behaved well to their wives, and gladly accepted the work that was offered to them.

The frost still continued with an intensity, unknown to the memory of even the oldest inhabitant. Coal rose to a price that was almost prohibitory to the poor. Blankets were scarce. All through the country, the distress was extreme. We heard rumours of scarlet fever and small-pox; but no cases had occurred in our neighbourhood.

And as the distress deepened, so the cold increased. Strong men failed to get warm, even with the sharpest exercise. Little children cried and pined, and withered away. Birds were found dead on the snow. This fearful and unnatural frost seemed to numb one's very thoughts. Even we, well-housed, and fed, and clad, shivered over the fire, and, though in our warm rooms, wore shawls and cloaks, as if we were going out for a walk.

Then came reports of bread riots, in the towns, and then, of robberies; but we hoped that was not true. At all events, we worked hard for our own poor people, and tried to temper the bitter cold to them as much as we could.

Our quiet was one day disturbed by the advent of the local paper, whose columns bore the announcement that a house had been broken into, only three miles off, and a quantity of plate stolen. Other robberies were reported in the neighbourhood, and the police were supposed to be on the track of the thieves.

Mr. Gascoign set off for Beales, to try and learn more, and we anxiously awaited his return.

Aunt Jemima and Miss Parsons were in a sad tremor.

"Where there are robbers, there are generally murderers; are there not, Anselm?" asked Aunt Jemima.

"One sin leads to another," replied her lord and master.

"I never lock my bed-room door at night, without first looking under the bed," pursued Miss Parsons. "It would be so fearful, to lock oneself in with a murderer, thirsting for one's blood."

"It makes one shudder, to think of it; doesn't it, Anselm?" asked Mrs. Pinchley.

"We ought to feel, that we are protected by a higher Power!" replied the divine.

"Did you feel that, when you were under the pump, Pinchley?" cruelly demanded Uncle Dick.

"Most certainly!" was the lofty reply.

"Oh! then you were all right!" rejoined our uncle, chuckling notwithstanding.

"I remember hearing of a story," pursued Miss Parsons, about a lady, who one night locked her door without first looking under the bed. Then she went to the other end of the room, and while there, saw, under the bed, the soles of a man's boots turned towards her——"

"Oh yes," interrupted Uncle Dick, "I know! They were the soles of her own goloshes——"

"No, no, they were really a man's feet; and she caught hold of them, and dragged——"

"No, no, Miss Parsons dear," interrupted Ben. "That's not it. *I* told you the story; and nurse told it to Winnie and me so many times, that I know it by heart."

"What is it, Ben?" asked Aunt Jemima, with interest.

"Once upon a time (that's how nurse begins all her stories)," said Ben; "once upon a time a lady went to bed. She was all alone in a lone country house, but expected her husband home in about an hour; and he was to bring with him a large sum of money. While waiting for him to come, she went to her bed-room, put on her dressing-gown, and began to brush her hair. And while doing it she happened to glance at the bed, and there, under it, she saw—the soles of a man's boots!"

"Her husband's, for a penny!" cried Uncle Dick.

"No indeed, uncle; it was a real man—a robber!"

"Oh! I'm so frightened!" cried Uncle Dick.

"Please don't, uncle!" pleaded Ben. "Well, the poor lady didn't know what to do. She at once guessed, that the man on his knees under the bed, meant to wait till she and her husband were asleep, and then murder and rob them both; and she knew, that if she betrayed that she had seen him, he would perhaps murder her, and make his escape. Just then, her baby cried; so she took it out of its cradle, and began to sing to it, song after song. And oh! how her heart beat all the time! At last she heard her husband return, let himself in with a latch key, and come upstairs. Then he entered the room, and she flew to meet him, and threw her arms round his neck, and hid the dreadful man from him. 'How pale you are, dear!' said her husband. 'Yes, I am so tired, and baby has been so tiresome.' And then she burst into tears, and sobbed, and wept on her husband's shoulder. 'I'm better now,' she said. 'Come and see baby. Doesn't he look pretty, asleep?' So, when she had got him beside the cradle, so that the robber's back was towards him, she suddenly laid one hand on his mouth, and, with the other, pointed straight at the man under the bed. Her husband did not lose his presence of mind. He only said, 'Well, here's the money. I will count it on the bed.' Then he quietly took up a cord that was lying on a box, and placed it in his wife's hands. Then he went up to the bed, stooped, seized the man's ankles with both hands, and dragged him out, face downwards, planting his foot upon the man's back. Taking the cord from his wife, he bound the man's feet firmly together, with part of the cord; and with the rest he tied his arms behind his back. Then he turned him over, and, as soon as he saw his face, knew him, as a discharged servant of his, who had come to rob, and perhaps murder, him in his sleep."

"What was done to him?" asked Aunt Jemima.

"He was transported for life."

"And what do you consider the *moral* of that story, Ben?" asked Uncle Dick.

"Never to go to bed, without looking under the bed first, uncle."

"But why the deuce didn't the woman cut out of the room, and give the alarm?"

"She thought, that if she did, the man would suspect she had seen him, and would bolt through the window."

"Well, and the best thing he could have done."

"No uncle, because he might have met her husband on the road, and have murdered him!"

"Ah! what sweet, tender creatures, wives are! I really must marry! But my affections were blighted long ago, when your mother rejected all my plaints and tears, and married your father instead of me!"

Mamma laughed, and replied, "If my chance of marriage had depended on you, Richard, I must have died single!"

We all knew that he was a determined old bachelor.

"Here comes Gerald," said my father. And Mr. Gascoign came in.

"Have you heard anything more?" we asked.

"Oh yes, as bad a thing as you could imagine. One of the thieves has been caught; and he says that there is a gang of them, and that one of them, is poor old Betty's son."

"Oh, how dreadfully sad!" said mamma.

"Have they taken him up?" asked our father.

"No, they have been to Betty's cottage, and have searched it; but he was not there."

"Have you seen Betty?" I asked.

"Yes; poor soul! I saw her last night. She was frantic with terror and grief. But I could not make her understand that her son is to be apprehended for robbery. She persists in saying, that the officers are after him as a deserter, and that if he is caught, he will be shot. She said, 'Oh Sir, they may deceive *you*, but they can't deceive a mother! They want to shoot him,—my brave, beautiful boy!'"

"It is strange," mused Aunt Jemima, "how that poor woman is blinded by maternal affection. It throws an odd sort of halo around that hideous creature, and makes him, in her eyes, a miracle of beauty and goodness."

Poor Aunt Jemima! Wifely devotion, in her case, produced a glamour quite as strong as maternal love in old Betty's. Such mental blindness often results from very deep feeling, and generally, also, is the greatest blessing to those afflicted with it.

"Betty said, that her son had been out two nights ago, when she had thought he was in bed, but he had returned suddenly in the middle of the night, and, knocking sharply on the door, had cried out, 'Let me in, mother—Let me in! The soldiers are after me, and if you let out that I am here, I'll be taken

and shot for a deserter!' 'But,' she added, 'no one came after him then. I got him to bed, and made up my bed across his door, to guard him. After a bit I fell asleep. When I went in to him next morning, he was gone, and I've not seen him since. They were here after him yesterday. Thank the Lord, he was not here!' I had not the heart to convince her, as I could have done, that her son was the leader of a gang of burglars; so I left, promising to return soon."

"Winnie, shall we go to her?" asked our mother, glancing out at the deep snow.

"Oh yes, mamma,—in the sleigh," I replied,

"I'll go with you," cried good Uncle Dick, with alacrity. "Pinchley, won't you come?"

"Certainly not," replied that person, shivering at the idea. "I have no patience with that old woman's perversity! She must have spoilt that man when he was a boy! If I went, it would only be to tell her, that her present troubles are the natural result of her culpable maternal weakness."

"Then we won't have you," said Uncle Dick.

We hardly felt the cold, so absorbed were we by the thought of poor Betty's troubles. I suppose the snow deadened the sound of the horses' feet; for Betty did not know it was we who came to visit her. We knocked at the door, and immediately saw her face looking at us through the window. Then we heard her undraw a bolt, and unlock the door. It was strange. She did not seem glad to see us, and had a startled, nervous look, when we entered.

We noticed that a chest of drawers was placed against the door of the bedroom, and that a curtain had been hung over the door, as if to conceal it.

"Betty," said Mamma, "your son is in that room."

"No ma'am, if you'll believe me—no!" faltered the poor old woman.

"If he's there, he's very foolish," said Uncle Dick. "They are sure to look for him here!"

"No indeed, Sir," replied Betty, very earnestly; "he says, that as they came here to look for him yesterday and didn't find him, they will search far off, now, and he's safer here than anywhere else. And so, he crept in last night, looking famished, and whispering that hoarse,—'Food! Food!' as if he were a starving wild beast. And Oh! his poor eyes so big and wild, with the hunger and the fright! Oh deary me! what

have I done? I've told he's here! And I promised I wouldn't!"

"Never mind," said Mamma, very gently; "we won't betray your son. Lock your door again."

But, in passing the window to do so, poor Betty changed colour, sprang to the door with the agility of a young girl, and, after barring it, began hastily to pile chairs and tables against it.

"It's them! It's them!" she whispered. "They've come back!"

She was gasping for breath, now, and trembling violently.

"Better take away those chairs and tables," suggested Uncle Dick; "they would only make the men suspect your son's presence here."

So saying, he quietly removed them, and arranged them in their proper places. Then he made us sit down on the sofa, and begged Betty to try and look as composed as possible, and to open the door the moment the constables knocked. But she shook her head resolutely.

Then came the expected knock upon the door. At the same moment, we saw two men pass before the window, to go round to the back of the cottage; and we knew that Charlie Lake's last chance of escape was cut off.

Betty made no answer to the knock, though, with mute gestures, we urged her to do so.

She sat still, in front of the chest of drawers, her hands clasped tight, her lips firmly compressed.

The men, growing impatient, rapped louder, and called out, "Let us in!"

Still, Betty neither stirred nor spoke. Then the door was shaken violently, and a gruff voice called out, "If you don't open the door, we must burst it open, Mrs. Lake. I'm George Warren."

"The constable!" exclaimed Betty. "It's Mr. Warren's voice. Are the soldiers with you, Mr. Warren?"

"No, only me and my men. What do we want with soldiers? Let us in now."

"Oh Mr. Warren, what can you want with a poor old woman like me?" pleaded Betty. "I've done nothing to be took up for! I'm very ill in bed, Mr. Warren, and can't get up to open the door."

"Then we'll do it for you," was the reply.

There was a heaving, and then a crash, and the next moment, the door fell in, and two constables entered. They touched their hats to us, and civilly asked Uncle Dick whether Lake was not in the cottage.

"I have not seen him," was the reply.

The men were not long in ascertaining that Lake was not in that room. Then they advanced towards the bed-room door. The curtain was of no use now, since Warren knew the cottage well.

"Please to move, Mrs. Lake," he said, to Betty.

But she stood her ground, rigidly determined to place a barrier between the men and her son.

Thereupon, they lifted her, chair and all, away, removed the chest of drawers, and pulled down the curtain. The poor old woman flew upon the two constables, and dragged at them with all her might. Then, seeing they would effect their purpose, shrieked out, "Charlie, they'll have you. Jump out of the window. Run! Run!"

We heard a noise in the next room, the report of a pistol, and a dog's shriek, and the window was thrown open; then there was a struggle, a series of deep oaths; and the next minute, Charlie passed the window between the other two constables, hand-cuffed, and powerless. They brought him into the cottage. Betty sprang forward, and would have thrown her arms around him; but he sharply repulsed her. Warren said, "Nay, nay, man! say good-bye to your poor old mother."

"The game's up," replied the brute. "Wot's the good of palavering with a crazy old 'ooman? I'll go with you quiet."

"You'd better," said the constable.

Uncle Dick put in, "Helen, it would be a great convenience to the officers, if you would let them convey him in the sleigh to the lock-up at Walsham."

"Oh, of course," replied mamma. "It can come back for us afterwards. I wont leave Betty at present!"

They went off at once, accompanied by Uncle Dick, who sent the groom home.

"Oh! my boy! my boy! my boy!" moaned Betty, when they were gone. "Oh my boy! my Charlie! To think they'll shoot him! my Charlie! my little lad!"

"They will *not* shoot him, Betty," said mamma, very gently.

"Oh ma'am! say that again! Are you *sure* they won't? Say those blessed words again!"

"He is charged with *robbery*," said my mother—"not with desertion."

"Then they won't shoot him. Oh! praise be to God! And he'll soon be free—my brave lad—and come back! *He* rob! Oh! its all a mistake, and it will be found out!"

"Depend upon it, the truth will come to light, Betty," replied Mamma, anxious to sooth the poor old soul, who became much more pacified, and fell to talking of old times, and of how she and her little lad and her "dear gal" had been so happy together once. And so the time passed away, till Uncle's return with the sleigh; when we left Betty comparatively cheerful, making up the fire, and preparing a cup of tea, against the speedy return of "her little lad, bless him!" But Uncle Dick told us, there was no chance of that; that Charlie was a desperate ruffian, leader of a gang, and that proof was dead against him.

"It will kill poor Betty," said Mamma, sighing deeply.

CHAPTER XII.

THE thaw came at last, with a vengeance. The whole country was flooded. The rivers rose, and overflowed their banks; and some of the cottages were almost under water. In some cases, the poor people barely escaped with their lives; while their furniture floated away before their eyes. Cattle and poultry were drowned, stacks were destroyed; the havoc was very sad indeed. Most of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood bestirred themselves with might and main to help the sufferers; but none were so active as Mr. Gascoign. We saw little of him; for he was here, there, and everywhere at once, till the first distress was over. He was a really "muscular Christian;" and the poor people recognised that fact, looked up to him in all their troubles, and felt comfort in his very presence. As soon as the floods began to subside, he went from cottage to cottage, accompanied by a band of workers, whom he directed in mending roofs, plastering up holes, patching fences, and performing many other works of a like useful nature. He would himself mount a ladder, and hammer away vigorously, talking cheerily to the men all the while, of the pleasure there was in real work; so that they began to feel as if they had one sense more than they had had all their lives, and a sense that opened up a grand field of enjoyment too.

But, one day, he came in with a troubled face, to tell us that Charlie Lake was convicted, and, being found to be an old offender, was sentenced to transportation for life. Moreover, his mother's cottage had been searched; and under the flooring of Charlie's bed-room, had been found a considerable quantity of the missing plate. It had come out, too, that he had been leader in a great robbery some months ago, that the hue and cry had been raised, and that he had fled for concealment to his mother's village.

"And I have a strong idea," added Mr. Gascoign, "that he is no son of hers, but some rascal who has personated her son for his own ends."

"But how could he know there was such a person as Betty?" asked our father.

"I don't know; but I do think he is not her son."

"Does she know he is sentenced?"

"Yes; but her great grief is, that he is such a bad man. She says, she would rather never have seen him again—rather he had died. She is inconsolable."

We took the pony carriage, and went to see her; and Ben, who was now allowed to go out, went with us; but we could do nothing to comfort her. All her cry was, "Oh! my boy! my boy! If he had only died, I could have borne that!"

A kind neighbour came in, and said she would stay with her; and so we had to return, as the afternoon was wearing on, and we feared the dew for Ben. He was still delicate, his cough not having quite left him; and his too rapid growth made us rather nervous. He did not complain; but we sometimes feared he felt ill, though it might be only weakness. Our father, we were sure, felt terribly anxious about his darling. Often, we noticed, his eyes unconsciously rested upon him with yearning love, as though he feared he would one day have to give him up.

Mamma one day said something of the sort to me, and added, that if our darling Ben were to die, the shock would kill our father. I gasped with terror, as I asked her what had put such a dreadful thought into her head. She replied vaguely, that she had always felt, Ben was not fit for a man's life; he was so good—such a little angel—and so on. I exclaimed, that "some men *were* angels—too good for this world!"

"Are they, dear?" she asked, with a little smile.

"Yes," I eagerly replied. "There is dear papa, and—and——"

"You would find it hard to name another?" she asked.

I did not answer her question, but, reverting to Ben, said,

"But Mother dear, about Ben; have you any other reason?"

"He is extremely weak—languid, in fact. He has grown much too fast, and loses flesh——."

I interrupted. "Of course; people always do, when they grow so fast. You wouldn't like our Ben to be a little dwarf of a man, would you, dear mamsey?"

"No, love; but I would rather he did not lose flesh so rapidly. And I wish he had not this tiresome cough."

"Dear Mother, tell me—had his illness anything to do with his being delicate now?"

"I think not, dear; I think he quite got over that, before

this delicacy fell upon him. He was a delicate baby, you know; and Dr. Gillias always said he would never grow up to be a man."

I did not answer. I felt giddy at the thought of what the world would be without Ben, if he were taken away. The future looked so cold and blank, that I felt I could lie down and die, that moment, rather than face it.

"But the summer is coming," added my mother. "Perhaps Ben's cough will leave him then, and he will get strong."

I saw that she was trying to cheer me, because her words had made me so utterly desolate. I shook my head.

"Still, dear, I have said what I have, that you may try and brace yourself to meet God's will, if it please Him to take away our darling for a season," she said, tenderly kissing me.

"If it is His will, I must try—I *will* try—to bear it; for I know, that if it were His will, it would be well for Ben, and for all of us," I faltered.

"If Ben grow up to be a man, I cannot think that his life will be a *very* happy one," she resumed.

"Oh, *why*, Mother? *We* could make it happy," I exclaimed.

"No, dear. His nature is too gentle, too refined, sensitive, poetical even, for a man's career. He feels everything too acutely. The pain of even the minutest animal or insect is an acute grief to him. See how he frets about Betty's trouble."

"Yes; he seems to take everything to heart, and to grieve over it. We ought to keep him from ever hearing of trouble."

"And how can that be, if he grows up to manhood?"

I could not answer her, for I felt that she was right, and that my brother was too pure, too angelic in nature, to be fitted for a man's life. The thought had occurred to me dimly, many a time before; but now, my mother's words placed the truth in a more definite and palpable form. Only, I still shrank from it, still tried to think that it might not be; that Ben might some day make a sudden start into health and strength, and prove that we had all been deceived.

A fortnight had passed away, since Lake's conviction, and then poor old Betty lay dying—of a broken heart, it seemed. Some of us went to sit with her every day, and a nurse was with her day and night, but she steadily declined, and all her plaint was, "Oh, if he had died years ago, when he was innocent! I could have been happy then!"

One day our mother was sitting beside her bed, trying to

lead her thoughts away to the home she was nearing so fast, and to her other child, who was waiting for her there; but in vain. She kept moaning, that "she would never see her boy, her darling little lad, again,—never, never!"

"You will know the reason of it then, Betty, and see that it is right."

She shook her head.

"Yes, Betty, and perhaps God will touch Charlie's heart, and he will repent, and you will know it for certain."

Still she refused to be comforted; but the latch of the door was lifted, and Mr. Gascoign entered. A feeble, sickly smile passed over the dying woman's face as her eyes rested upon him.

"I'm going fast now, Sir, I think," she said.

"I bring you comfort, Betty," he replied, sitting down beside her, and gently taking within his own, the poor withered hand.

"Has he repented?" she cried, a momentary flush passing over her face.

"No; I fear the man who called himself your son, is a long way off from repentance! But be comforted; your son died long ago; died, a good man, believing in God's love and mercy, and feeling assured that he was entering upon happiness."

"Don't deceive me, Sir! It's too good to be true!" murmured poor Betty.

"It *is* true. He died in Australia, in the bush. He and this man, and two others, were together. I have been to see this man in the jail to-day, and promised to do what I could do for his daughter, his affection for whom is the one bright spot in his character. In return, he told me that he was not your son; that Charlie died in the bush, and, in dying, entrusted to his care a little Bible, and a letter, both to be delivered to you if he ever returned to England. At last he did return, and immediately recommenced his former career, by joining a band of house-breakers. Being nearly caught, and seeking a hiding-place, the idea occurred to him, of personating your son. You know the rest. And here is the Bible, and the letter."

The poor soul's face worked convulsively. Two large tears slowly gathered and brimmed over. Then, in broken accents, she murmured, "Praise be to God!" Seeing that she could not read her son's letter, Mr. Gascoign offered to do so

for her. Making allowance for bad spelling, etc., it ran thus:—

"DEAR AND HONOURED MOTHER,

"I shall never see you or old England again now, for I am dying here in the bush, with only a few rough fellows around me. One of them I nursed through the fever, and he talks of going back to England one day, and he has sworn on the Book to take this letter and the Bible you gave me, to you, in token that I never forgot you, my dear mother, and kept the Bible to the last. Dear mother, I did wrong to desert, but I was punished for what I never did, and I couldn't stay with the rest after that. They accused me of theft. I've heard since that the man who stole the spoons was found out, and flogged and imprisoned; but I had deserted then, and took to the Bush, and it was too late to go back. Dear mother, I have never stolen, nor done nothing to disgrace you, though since I have been ill I've learnt how great a sinner I've been in many ways that I never saw before. But I know that God is merciful, and I believe he loves me and forgives me. Good-bye, dear mother. I am going where you will come to me some day. And so no more,

"Your dutiful son,

"CHARLIE LAKE."

The old woman's hands were clasped together; the tears streamed down her wasted cheeks; but no word escaped her. Only, her dimmed eyes rested on her son's Bible, on the first page of which was written, "To my dear lad Charlie, from his dutiful mother, Betty Lake."

Mr. Gascoign, seeing that she wished him to read to her out of her son's Bible, chose a portion of the 107th Psalm.

Betty lay quite still, her hands clasped, her eyes closed, her lips a little parted. Mr. Gascoign paused, thinking that she slept, or else that her spirit had passed away. Suddenly she opened her eyes, raised her withered hands towards heaven, and in a sort of rapture of joy, repeated the words—

"Oh! that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

An unbroken silence followed. We thought she slept; but her breathing grew fainter and fainter, till we could no longer detect it: and so her spirit, painlessly and imperceptibly, went away to meet her "poor girl" and her "little lad Charlie."

CHAPTER XIII.

I CANNOT remember a more lovely spring than the one that followed. The Pinchleys and Uncle Dick had left soon after the thaw set in, and we were again together alone, and living very quietly.

Ben and I were nearly always together, as in the old times, walking, riding, driving, only I no longer romped or raced, or went about with untidy hair or torn dress, as of old. All that was altered, partly because I was no longer a child, partly because my dear mother's influence had worked a most happy change in all my ideas. Looking back at what I had been, and had at one time promised to become, I drew a mental picture of what I should have been now, but for the bitter lesson I had had to learn, and for my mother's wise and gentle guidance, and I felt that I could never be grateful enough, that I had been checked in time. Nor did I feel thankful on my account alone. I saw that I had been a disturbing element in the household, where peace would have reigned but for me; for Ben had never transgressed except for my sake, or at my instigation. When I thought upon all this, and remembered how my darling Ben had suffered and nearly died, and my dear father had become a confirmed invalid through my headstrong waywardness, tears rained down my cheeks, and my anguish well nigh mastered me. At such times, if my mother found that I had been weeping, she would again remind me how "all things work together for good," yes, even our own faults and vices, when repented of, and made to serve even as the bitter medicine, or the surgeon's knife serves, to check the disease, or to cut away the poisoned flesh.

"You will see the reason of it all, some day, Winnie," she would say, in her quiet, convincing tones; and then I felt comforted.

Ben and I had renewed our compact, always to live together—never to marry. Only, I was not to keep house for him; Papa and "dear Mamsey" would always do that, and we would all live together. Ben was growing stronger, we thought; and he was now having lessons from the Curate, a clever, sensible man, and a hard-worker in the parish, a favourite with the poor, though not *such* a favourite as "our Parson," as they fondly termed the Rector.

One great comfort, I had; which was, that he had forgiven me, and trusted me again. Till I was sure of that, I could not be quite happy. His voice was very gentle when he spoke to me, and his gaze often rested upon me with a quiet approval, which made me feel that nothing was irretrievable, that it was hardly ever too late to undo the wrong one had done. Once or twice he had said, very quietly, "Go on Winnie. I know it is up-hill work; but if you persevere, the difficulty will cease at last," or some such words. And the difficulty did become less and less, till at last it did almost entirely cease. Yet, long after I had conquered my uncouth, wild, unfeminine habits, I still had a terrible trial to struggle against, in an untamed temper, and an unruly will. These two foes were still my besetting trouble. I think, that not even Mr. Gascoign knew this, for he was gentleness and kindness itself, and sometimes upheld me, even against Aunt Jemima or Mr. Pinchley, when he little knew what a storm of anger was surging in my heart.

Each season seemed to bring some event with it. This season brought a visit from Joe. One day the servant came into the room to say that, "a young man of the name of 'Joe' wanted to see Miss Travers."

"Joe? Joe? I don't know anyone of that name," said Papa. "Ask his business, William."

But Ben sprang to his feet, dashed past William, and, the next moment, dragged in our dear good Joe, looking very bashful, very much downcast, and very much grown.

He had soon told his tale. His father and uncle had been caught in a squall, and drowned, and the boat was lost. He and his brothers and sisters were entirely destitute, and so was his poor old grandmother. He came to ask for help.

Our father first welcomed him; then, finding that he had walked all the way from Cellings, and had eaten little on the road, himself took him to the kitchen, where all the servants were assembled at dinner, and said, "This is the lad who twice saved Master Ben's life. Make him as welcome as you can. He will live here as long as he pleases."

There was no need for more; Joe was a great favourite from that moment. But he was not one to eat the bread of idleness; an hour had hardly passed, when, on asking for him, we were told that he was helping to work in the field.

When Mr. Gascoign came in, we held a council of war, to

determine what was to be done anent the Joe family. Mamma said that she would take one girl to be under the cook, and that she knew of a place as under-nurse for another. Papa said he would take Joe's brother on, to help the gardener.

"But the grandmother?" suggested Mr. Gascoign.

That was a difficulty. But Mamma got over it by suggesting that Papa should let her have poor Betty Lake's cottage rent free, and that the remaining girl should live with her and take in needlework, or perhaps help to teach in the school. And so, four were provided for.

"But what about Joe?" asked Mr. Gascoign.

"Can't he stay here too?" said Papa, in a tone of disappointment.

"There is no congenial occupation for him here," replied the Rector.

It *was* puzzling, what to do with Joe?

Just at that moment, in came William, to say, that Joe "would like to speak to the master, if he might make so bold." So Joe was admitted.

Joe came to say, that the servants had been telling him about the Rector's boat, how it wanted painting; and if he wasn't making too bold, would the gentleman let him paint it for him, as the painter had disappointed him.

"Have you ever painted a boat, Joe?" asked Mr. Gascoign, with much interest.

"I always painted our boat, Sir," replied Joe, pulling his fore-lock, "and a many besides ours."

"Come along then, Joe, and make yourself useful," replied the Rector.

They both went away, and, watching from the window, we noticed that Joe fell behind Mr. Gascoign, but that Mr. Gascoign made him walk beside him, and the two talked earnestly till they were out of sight.

On the Rector's return that evening, we found that it was all arranged about Joe, who was to take charge of the boat, keep it in thorough repair, and fill up spare time in the garden, or in mending fences, etc., at all of which jobs he was very handy.

The next day, Joe, provided with funds, went back to Cellings; and within a fortnight the whole Joe family were installed at Elmsleigh as we had arranged. And so the spring passed away, and summer came.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was just two years since that memorable summer—how long ago it seemed!—when we had deserted our home. I was seventeen, Ben, thirteen. Save that he had grown so tall and slight, he was just the same that he had been two years ago, still our "little Ben," the pet and baby of the house. I had changed wonderfully, as much in character as in form. I have before me now, a picture of myself and my brother, painted at that time, and considered excellent likenesses. We were taken in the grotto. I stood gazing into the pool; Ben was half lying on the ground at my feet, looking up into my face. A fair, delicate boy, with gentle, undulating features, deep, dark eyes, and waving, gold-brown hair. As he looks up into my face, his lips are slightly parted, with the tender smile they always wore when they spoke those loving words, "My Winnie!" and his upturned eyes are filled with a bright and winsome expression, that was all his own.

The girl beside him is tall and slight, and full of girlish grace. Her features are more marked than his, and her face and form possess a health and vigour that are wanting in his. In complexion she is a clear brunette. Her eyes are dark grey, with sweeping black lashes. Such were we in those days. All who look at the picture are at first attracted by my portrait; then they turn to Ben's, and find in it something that charms them so much, they hardly know how to leave it.

As I said, the summer had come. Ben certainly appeared stronger; but our father made no advance towards convalescence. Oh! if by giving up ten, twenty years, or the whole of my own life, brightly as it seemed to stretch out before us, I could have restored my dear father to what he was before that dreadful summer!—but whenever I thought so, I remembered, sooner or later, my mother's assurance that "all things work together for good," and I hoped I should see it so one day.

I had so begged and prayed to have just this one summer all to myself with Ben and Mamma, and Papa, that my petition was granted, and the "young friend" was not to be

invited to stay with me yet awhile; but, as a set-off, I was to go on a visit to the Pinchleys'. Aunt Jemima, on leaving us, had stipulated that I was to visit her, and she now so urged me to fulfil my promise, that Papa and Mamma, fancying she was out of health or in low spirits, insisted on my going. It was dreadful! to think of leaving, even for a short time, all that I loved, and most of all Ben, from whom I had never been parted for a day! It made me so unhappy, that I lost my appetite, and even my sleep, through thinking of it. Seeing this, my father hastened my departure, and so at last I was to go on the following day.

That last day, Ben and I were inseparable. We linked our arms one within another, and wandered mournfully about the grounds, saying little, but sighing often, promising over and over again to write long letters every day, telling everything we did, and said, and thought, and then returning to the one exclamation, "It is dreadful!"

At dinner time, Mr. Gascoign came in and said he would dine with us. I was glad, but still more glad when he said he wanted to see Mr. Pinchley, and he would be my escort. It was, I thought, like taking away part of the Elms with me; for, though nurse was to have accompanied me, she was not the same as Mr. Gascoign; besides, nurse could now stay with Ben.

Dinner over, Ben and I slipped away into the garden, and sat there hand in hand in silence. The air was filled with balmy heat; birds carolled softly and sweetly in the trees around us; insects hummed drowsily over-head; flowers steeped the warm air with their perfume. How does the memory of that soft bright summer eve cling to me even yet; the last, before all was changed!

The sun went down in one blaze of crimson. A soft dew fell. Our mother's voice was heard, calling Ben to come in.

"Coming, Mamma," he replied, in his sweet, childish voice, as we both rose to obey the summons.

We walked quietly hand in hand towards the house, Pearl frisking after us.

"Ben," I suddenly said, "do you know what day this is?"

"No darling," he replied, rather listlessly. He could think of nothing just then, except that this was our last evening together.

"This day two years ago, we ran away from home!"

"How strange!" he said. "How things have changed since then. How *we* have changed!"

"Not you, dear Ben," I softly answered. "*You* are the same. It is I, who have changed. And oh! how dearly I have had to pay for it!"

He looked at me in a troubled way; so I tried to speak cheerfully, and added, "But it is well, dear—it is well, well. Yes; and we must try to think that even this dreadful parting will be well too."

Ben sighed, but sadly shook his head, and we entered the house.

Tea was ready. After tea, our mother moved to the piano, and for a few moments her fingers wandered over the chords.

"Sing one of your little bird songs, Mamsey dear," pleaded Ben. Our mother complied:—

A bird sat singing in a tree,
Sing so gay!
Her nest and nestling's there, but she
Must flee away
At early dawn, and not return
Till ev'ning gray.
Sing not, fond bird, sing not so gay!
Thy happy song is still'd for aye!

Thou shalt return, no nest to find,
Sing so sad!
Nor birdlings shelter'd from the wind,
So warm and glad.
Thy mate has gone, thy nestlings dead,
Sing not! sing not! thy joy has fled!

Was that song prophetic? I shivered, and clasped Ben's hand tighter. What, if some dreadful calamity were to happen while I was away? What, if I were to return, and find the nest broken, or perhaps one nestling gone? Ben whispered, "It's like your going away, Winnie!" and looked piteously into my eyes. I smiled, and, to banish his trouble, tried to conquer my own. Then Mamma sang some more songs, and I too contributed my mite, this last evening at home.

That last evening—as it never was again! How well I remember it!

The soft dusky light came falling in gently through the large windows. Our mother sat at the piano, singing song

after song. Our father lay on the sofa, his white, thin face showing dimly in the half light, bearing the quiet, serene, happy look it always had when he was listening to our mother's music. Miss Parsons had drawn her chair into one of the windows close to the light, for she was deep in an intricate pattern in knitting. Mr. Gascoign was at the table, turning over the leaves of a book, his forehead partly shaded by his hand, from under which he now and then gazed earnestly upon me and Ben, who were close together, with our hands enclasped.

Could I ever forget it?

CHAPTER XV.

ALL was ready, and the carriage waited at the door, to take me and my mother to the station. Ben would not go; he said he could not bear to see the train take me away; "it would be like seeing me die!" and his dear face quivered all over, as he spoke. I kissed Papa again, hugged Ben to my heart, and was hurried into the carriage. I leant out to see the last of Ben, but he had disappeared, and I knew that the dear, faithful little heart, was sobbing itself out alone. I yearned to turn back.

"Oh, Mother!" I pleaded, "is it right, to grieve Ben so? Would Dr. Gillias allow it? Let us—let us turn back! You could write to Aunt Jemima and say that I had started, but that you had been afraid for Ben. Oh, Mamma! Mamma!"

"No, love," was her quiet, firm reply; "even for Ben's sake, you ought to go. Then, when he has to go to school, that will not be your first parting."

Then I gave way, and wept uncontrollably till we arrived at the station. Mr. Gascoign was there, and I felt ashamed of my tear-stained face; so I drew my veil over it, and did not speak. After a long, tender embrace from my mother, I was in the carriage; and then we moved out of the station.

For the first few miles Mr. Gascoign did not speak to me; but then, seeing that I was more composed, he drew my attention to the surrounding country, and, as we got farther away from home, told me the names of the villages, houses, and churches, that we flew past. It seemed so strange, being there without Ben; for I had not travelled at all since that unhappy summer two years ago. What an age it seemed since then, and how changed was everything!

We fell to talking about Aunt Jemima. I could not conceal my sentiments regarding her husband, and Mr. Gascoign smiled.

"There are some people," he said, "who, insignificant in themselves, have such wonderful power to excite all one's worst feelings."

"I always feel inclined to say something to aggravate Mr. Pinchley," I responded.

"So do I," he replied; "and, knowing that, I am on my guard."

"I used to feel the same towards Aunt Jemima," I pursued; "but I do not feel it now. Why, I wonder?"

"She has changed so much," he observed.

"Yes," I said, "I know she has; but what has changed her?"

"When she lived with you, a powerful irritant was constantly applied to her by yourself and Ben," he remarked, with a quiet smile.

"Poor Aunt Jemima," I said. "But really, she was at times dreadfully provoking."

"And you did your best to make her more so!"

"*I* did—not Ben. I was a dreadful child."

"You were."

"And that is only two years ago! Am I so very much altered after all?" I mused.

"So much altered, that it is difficult to imagine you are the same person. You *were* a rude, ill-bred hoyden; you *are*—Well, never mind."

"Oh, say!" I pleaded. "Do encourage me! I have been so afraid that I have not improved enough, considering the dreadful warnings and punishments I have had, and all that our dear mother has done for me."

"I was going to say," he replied, very softly, "that you are now a very gentle and——"

"What?" I asked, colouring.

"—And lovable woman."

My eyes filled with happy tears. I exclaimed, "Oh, I am *so* glad to know it! But I am hardly a woman yet," I added.

"No, hardly," he said, with a smile.

"What a dreadful girl I should have been by this time, if I had not been checked."

"Indeed, you would. I can't bear to think of what you were."

"Oh! if only Papa were the same that he was before the accident!" I sighed. "That was my doing!"

"Yes, so far; but don't forget, that, through being in that accident, he escaped the other, which might have been far more serious."

"Ah!" I shuddered, "if it had been so!—never to have seen him again! never to have begged his forgiveness!"

"It would have altered everything. Your mother too might have perished. Then she could not have brought Dr. Gillias to Ben. Ben would have died. Think, how different it would all have been."

"'All things work together for good,'" I murmured, remembering my mother's words.

"Indeed they do," he said; "but how hard to feel it, sometimes!"

"Yes, and even impossible," I replied.

"If Ben had died that time, I could not have seen it."

"Not then, I daresay; but later."

"No—I cannot imagine it possible."

"A minute ago you admitted that 'all things work together for good.'"

"Yes—because, thinking over all the other things connected with Papa's accident, I can see, that dreadful as it was, it might have been worse; and though it was owing to his summons home, in consequence of our running away, that he turned out of his intended route, that very change saved his life perhaps, *though* it caused that dreadful shock. Oh it was wonderful—wonderful, how——"

He smiled—"how 'all things work together for good?'"

"Yes!"

"Could you feel it now, if you met with any dreadful loss?"

"I should try—much more than I should once have done."

"In these matters we gain so much strength from former experience, and from thinking over all the crosses we have met in passing through life, and trying to see the *reason* of things. We generally can do that, as events unfold themselves before us, especially when time has softened the first violence of our feelings."

"Have *you* ever had to try in this way?" I timidly asked.

"Indeed I have—over and over again. Once I almost gave in—was almost tempted to say that that one trial *could* not be for the best."

I marvelled greatly; save for his wonderfully sweet smile and gentle manner, I should have thought he had never known a trial or a disappointment, so serene and happy was his nature. It had not occurred to me, that that very serenity was the result of temptation resisted and overcome, which had ensured that "peace which passeth all understanding."

But presently our talk took a livelier turn, and then some more passengers came in, over-dressed people, with over-dressed children, and one ever-crying baby; and though we talked no longer, Mr. Gascoign, who, like his sister, had an irrepressible "bump of fun," amused me with his expressive

looks, at each fresh sally on the part of our companions, who were evidently showing off. And so the journey passed much more quickly than I had expected; and at last he told me that the next station would be the last.

I looked out of the window, to see what sort of country we were in, and thought it rather flat and uninteresting; but before I had time to see much, we were at Appleford. Mr. Gascoign handed me out, and I looked round, expecting to see Aunt Jemima or Mr. Pinchley, but in vain; so he called a fly, and, getting into it, we drove to the Parsonage.

I expected—I don't know why—to see a pretty little house, covered with roses, a smooth lawn in front, and plenty of evergreen shrubs. I was disappointed; and yet I had no right to be, for Aunt Jemima had never described her new home. My eyes now rested on a rather tall, narrow, bare-looking edifice, so like Mr. Pinchley himself, that I could not help whispering my thought to Mr. Gascoign. There was no lawn, only a gravel wilderness in front of the house. A few sad-looking shrubs there were, but not one flower. My courage sank, but revived the next moment at the idea of a possible garden in the rear, filled with flowers, trees, and little rural paths.

Hardly had I taken in all this, when the door opened, and Mr. Pinchley appeared, with Aunt Jemima behind him, and a small servant girl in the background.

"You are welcome to the Chesnuts, Winifred," said Mr. Pinchley, in pompous and lugubrious tones, which made me feel that in receiving us, he was conferring an inestimable benefit, and one that had necessitated much struggle and self-denial on his part. At the same time he extended towards me a flabby, cold hand, the touch of which went through me like ice.

Aunt Jemima dared not kiss me, but squeezed my hand so hard, as to restore its chilled circulation.

"We are so glad to have you here, Winnie, at last. Are we not, Anselm?"

"I have already welcomed Winifred," was the response, in a tone that quelled any further demonstration.

Meanwhile Mr. Gascoign was shaking hands with them; and after that, we went into the house.

Into a narrow hall, with two doors on the right, and one on the left hand. The latter, Mrs. Pinchley opened, ushering

us into the room within, which I rightly conjectured was the drawing-room, as it contained a tall, stiff-looking piano, and the chimney-piece boasted a small mirror, the frame whereof was covered with that abomination, yellow gauze. I wondered at Aunt Jemima's taste. There was a coldness—a want of comfort—about the room, which damped one. My feet seemed to draw in cold, from the large linen crumb-cloth, strained tightly over the carpet (*was* there a carpet?) entirely covering the floor from wall to wall. But it all seemed so like Mr. Pinchley himself, so much a part of him, that, after all, one felt impressed with a feeling of uncomfortable harmony, and a general sense of the fitness of things.

"Winnie would perhaps like a little refreshment before she goes to her room? What do you think, Anselm?" Aunt Jemima timidly suggested.

"As she likes. A glass of wine and water, Winifred?—and a crust of bread? Or perhaps you agree with me, that eating between meals spoils digestion?"

"I will go with you, please Aunt," I said; for I somehow felt that Mr. Pinchley expected me to say it. He now addressed Mr. Gascoign.

"We have only one spare-room; but there are capital rooms at the inn, if——."

"Yes, yes," replied Mr. Gascoign, "and I have kept the fly. I return to Elmsleigh to-morrow, but I will look in this evening."

"Perhaps Mr. Gascoign will join us at dinner, at five o'clock? Don't you think so, Anselm?" Aunt Jemima timidly suggested.

"If you will favour our humble board, for *once*," responded our host, involuntarily accenting the last word. But Mr. Gascoign quickly replied,

"No, no, not to-day, thank you. I would rather look in for a cup of tea, if it is all the same."

So he left us, pressing my hand in encouragement, and looking down into my disconsolate face, with a smile that dispelled the depressing effect of the Pinchley atmosphere.

"I am going into my study, Jemima, and shall be engaged till dinner-time. I hope Winifred will be able to amuse herself in my absence."

Aunt Jemima took me up two flights of stairs, into a neat little room, very nicely arranged, and looking so bright, with

its trimmings of fresh white muslin and rose colour, and its pretty little ornaments everywhere, that I exclaimed, "Oh! what a delightful room!" Then poor Aunt Jemima, having first turned the key in the door, threw her arms around me, and broke into a passion of sobs. I was so astonished at first, that I did not know what to do; but at last I murmured, "Poor Aunt Jemima! I am so sorry!" This seemed to comfort her, though I had not said what I was sorry for; only I had a general impression that Mr. Pinchley was a brute, and that Aunt Jemima's happiness was gone for ever.

But she soon checked herself, and said, "She was very silly; it was because she was so glad to see me. She thought she was not quite well," and so on. Then she helped me to unpack my box, and to arrange my clothes in drawers. During this time, I had leisure to notice how very thin she had grown. She looked half starved.

"You don't look well, Aunt," I said.

"Don't say that before Anselm," she hurriedly exclaimed; "it makes him so angry."

Then others had noticed it, I thought! I was glad I had come.

"You don't look happy, dear Aunt Jemima," I said. "Is anything troubling you?"

"Oh no," she hastily answered; "you know, dear, I always had a bad temper. Anselm says, that if I struggle against it, I may improve in time."

"But you haven't a bad temper," I stoutly replied. "It needed, the temper of an angel to bear with *me*, in the old time. You would have been so good and kind, if we had behaved properly."

"No, dear. Anselm says that my temper made you and Ben what you were."

"Stuff! Nonsense! Cant!"

"Oh, Winnie! don't say that of Anselm!"

"Well, I will not, then."

"Indeed, Winnie, he is the best of men, and the best of husbands; but his standard of excellence is so high. I can never even approach it. I am always falling short; and when I see that he is disappointed in me, I think that I ought not to have married him, and I fret over it."

"You should not; no one is perfect, and a Christian clergyman, of all men, should make allowance for human frailty."

"Yes, dear; but I feel daily, more and more, that I was not worthy of him; that he deserved a better fate than to marry me!" And again her tears flowed.

"Nonsense, dear Aunt Jemima," I replied, as cheerfully as I could; "you are quite worthy of him—or of anyone! But you are out of health; you look half starved! I must make you eat and drink plenty!"

"Oh no, pray, Winnie!" she exclaimed, in a sort of terror. "Anselm cannot bear to see ladies eat much. He calls it 'giving way to fleshly appetite,' and says that it drags down all one's loftiest feelings, and produces indigestion, which irritates the temper."

"But you have always been accustomed to good living, Aunt."

"Yes, dear, and Anselm says it was very bad for me. He wishes I were more like his sister."

"And what is she like?"

"Oh, *so* like him!"

I felt an immediate antipathy.

"Where does she live? Not here, I hope?" I incautiously put in.

"She was not here when we first arrived, though she came to furnish the house, to please Anselm; but she has visited us now and then, and at last has come to live near us. She is a great comfort to Anselm."

"Why have you never said anything about her till now, Aunt?"

Poor Aunt Jemima hesitated and coloured, then replied, "Anselm desired me not to."

"Why?"

"Because he thought, that if your papa knew his sister visited us, he might think we ought to invite you, and (though you know, dear, you have quite redeemed your character) there was a time when Anselm thought himself not justified in inviting you."

"Oh, I see," I replied.

"But, Winnie, it *is* so good of you to come! It is such a comfort to have you here!"

"I am glad I came, Aunt," I heartily replied.

After that, we went down stairs, and I asked to see the garden; so we went through a door at the end of the hall, and I expected to see a blaze of flowers. Not a bit of it! Nothing but vegetables, and a few fruit trees, especially apples

for cooking; some strawberry beds, and raspberry and currant bushes. Again my spirit collapsed.

"When we came here," said Aunt Jemima, "there was a lovely lawn in front, and some beautiful flower beds; but Anselm said that with so many claims upon him, he did not feel justified in having a gardener even one day a week, to attend to the lawn and flowers; so he had it gravelled. And this garden in the back *was* so pretty!" she sighed.

"Why isn't it pretty now?" I asked, regarding with stern reprobation, the huge cabbages which flourished in goodly rows before me.

"Anselm said, that with so many claims upon his purse, it behoved him to provide as many vegetables for the table, as possible; so the pretty bowers, and little paths and lawns, with *such* great overarching shrubs, were all destroyed, and the garden was turned into a vegetable garden. I was silly enough—selfish enough, I may say—to cry, for which Anselm very justly reproved me. He says I have encouraged myself in a sort of mock sentimentality, unbecoming at any age, more especially at mine. I can't help it—indeed I can't!"

"Don't try to, Aunt," I said.

"Oh, I *must* try; but I am always transgressing. Even to-day——." She stopped.

"'Even to-day——.' What?" I asked.

"Well dear, I had set my heart upon taking a fly to the station, and going to meet you; but Anselm said, that if you did not come, it would be so much money wasted. I showed how disappointed I was, and he rebuked my want of wifely submission, and would not allow me to walk even to the station. I was in the wrong—as usual—yet I fretted, because I thought you would think it unkind of me not to meet you."

"But, my dear Aunt, your money is your own!"

"I settled it all upon Anselm, when we married."

"Oh Aunt, how *could* you!"

"I could not have bestowed it more worthily, my dear. And he had promised to will it back to me in case he died first; and he kept his word. Oh! he is so honourable!"

Silence ensued. Wending our way along the mean, hideous little gravel walks, I mused among the cabbages, upon the strange inconsistency of human nature. Here was a woman, who, 'midst all her little foibles, had always been of a generous, unselfish nature, and had loathed meanness, tied for life to a

being who was the very incarnation of mean selfishness; and she reverenced this repulsive creature, as the embodiment of every human virtue, as almost God-like in his wisdom and goodness. Oh! how love blinds us! And is it not well? In my soul, I prayed that Aunt Jemima might live on, to the end of her days, in this mental blindness; for, were the scales to fall from her eyes, the torture of clear vision would surely be too great to bear. Poor Aunt Jemima! How often have I remembered our walk that day among the cabbages!

After awhile a bell sounded, which my Aunt told me was the first dinner bell; so I ran up-stairs to dress, and then joined the Pinchleys in the drawing-room.

"I hope you have amused yourself, Winifred?" asked Mr. Pinchley, by way of saying something agreeable. It cost nothing!

"I have been in the garden," I replied.

"Ah! a garden is a fine thing—a useful thing," he rejoined. "Are you fond of cabbages?"

An imploring look from Aunt Jemima, induced me to reply in the affirmative.

"That is well," he remarked, in evident approval. "Cabbages contain *gluten*—a most nourishing principle in food. Do you study chemistry, Winifred?"

Another imploring glance from Aunt Jemima, caused me to state, that I had at present very little knowledge of that science, but that I knew it must be deeply interesting, and wished of all things to study it.

"Ah—well—ahem—perhaps I may—." I felt appalled at the possibility of his offering to put me through a course of chemistry, as he had once tried to do in theology; but at that moment the second bell sounded, and then the small servant announced dinner, to my very great joy, for I was nearly famished. Mr. Pinchley slowly arose, and with much ceremony offered me his arm. Again I reflected, that this act of courtesy cost nothing.

We sat down to table, and the covers were removed. Aunt Jemima said to me, nervously glancing towards her husband, "Winnie dear, you must excuse our homely fare. It is not what you have been accustomed to, at home."

"Hunger is the best sauce," enunciated Mr. Pinchley; "and the simpler the fare, the wholesomer."

I murmured, that I did not care what I ate, and, that today I was so hungry, I cared less than ever.

"Some Colecannon, Winifred?" asked Mr. Pinchley.

I did not know what "Colecannon" might be, and felt too hungry to be nice; but, on again tasting that remarkable mixture, only a few days later, I experienced for it the most violent repulsion and abhorrence. I think cabbage formed its basis; but it was indescribably nasty. Then followed another dish, also fortified with cabbage, and boiled cabbage also graced the board. The feast wound up with a very hard and indigestible pudding, of which I partook very sparingly.

After dinner, a few apples, and a decanter of wine, were placed on the table. My Aunt again glanced deprecatingly towards me.

"A glass of wine, Winifred?" asked Mr. Pinchley.

I never drank wine, and therefore declined, to his evident satisfaction; but I was surprised to see Aunt Jemima decline likewise. Mr. Pinchley took one glass, then rose, locked away the wine, and we all went into the drawing-room.

"I am glad you like our humble way of living, Winifred," said Mr. Pinchley.

I had not said I liked it; but I did not mind his thinking I did.

"I believe you are fond of music?" he asked.

"Very," I replied.

Aunt Jemima at once moved towards the piano, followed by her husband. The flute was produced, and she patiently and delightedly toiled with him through a remarkably asthmatic performance, diversified by wonderful trills, quavers, and shakes. I had fortunately armed myself with a little needle-work, and sat thinking of home, of my mother at the piano, of my father, and of my dear Ben, so lonely without me; and as I pictured it all to myself, quiet tears rose to my eyes, and stole down my cheeks.

The door opened, and Mr. Gascoign entered. He glanced quickly towards me, then, signing to the musicians not to stop, at once came and sat beside me on the sofa. I had not yet regained composure, and he saw it. Gently laying his hand on mine, he said, "Will you go back with me to-morrow?"

My heart gave a great leap of joy; I half answered "Yes;" but just at that moment, poor Aunt Jemima played a false note. Mr. Pinchley's flute in an instant ceased its wheezing, and his fist came down with an impatient bang on the piano.

"You are *always* blundering!" he exclaimed, for the moment forgetting our presence.

"Oh! Anselm dear, pray forgive me! I am very stupid! I am not a good enough musician to accompany you!" she pleaded, in piteous accents.

"Don't let us have a domestic scene," replied her husband, remembering we were there.

"Shall I go on?" she asked.

"Yes, I dare say you will do better this time," he remarked.

I felt that a very different answer would have been given, but for our presence. So the flute resumed its asthma, and the performance went on flowingly.

"Shall I take you back to-morrow?" repeated Mr. Gascoign.

He seemed to wish that I should say "Yes." I asked, "Do you want me to go?"

"I want you to do as you like," he replied. "If you feel that you will not be happy here, and that perhaps your health may suffer—, but, decide for yourself."

"I think I *ought* to stay," I replied, glancing towards the piano.

"Then stay, my dear," he said, pressing my hand.

About an hour later, a hideous and prolonged scream from the flute, accompanied by a series of crashing chords on the piano in the bass, brought the performance to a triumphant conclusion; and then Mr. Pinchley rang the bell, and desired the small servant to bring in glasses, and water. On their appearance he retired, and re-appeared, bearing in one hand a decanter of sherry, in the other a plate of biscuits.

"A glass of wine?" to Mr. Gascoign.

"None, thank you."

"Then as I don't like wine before going to bed, and as Jemima and Winifred never drink it, I may as well put it away. I always keep it under lock and key. It is not right to throw temptation in the way of servants. Jemima is very careless in these matters."

So saying, he carried off the precious wine, and then returned, apparently with a weight off his mind. How this man irritated me! In his presence I felt a sort of insane desire to seize the nearest thing at hand—if glass or china, so much the better,—and dash it violently to the ground. As that could not be, I chafed and fumed internally.

Mr. Gascoign soon left. After shaking hands with the Pinchleys, he turned to say good-bye to me. A "good-bye, Winnie," and a quiet firm clasp of my hand, and he was gone, and I felt very lonely and desolate.

CHAPTER XVI.

I THINK that at no time of my life have my worst feelings been so called forth, and my better ones crushed, as during my stay under Mr. Pinchley's roof. To meanness he added tyranny, to tyranny selfishness, to selfishness hypocrisy. For myself I could have borne it, knowing that I could escape at any moment; but my whole soul rose against the man, when I witnessed his daily oppression of poor Aunt Jemima, and all under a pretence of "doing his duty, in correcting her faults." I think, that after all, avarice was his predominant vice. Though Aunt Jemima's income, settled upon him, was most ample, he pinched and hoarded at every turn, begrudging her those comforts and necessities of life to which he knew she had always been accustomed. I was sick of that constant phrase, "We are not justified in affording" such or such a thing, and of all his mean little excuses and inventions for stinting and starving his household. My patience was waning fast.

One day, about a month after my arrival, Aunt Jemima and I went for a long walk through dusty, stupid roads. All the country was flat, and stupid, and dusty; how unlike the sweet hills, and dales, and woods around Elmsleigh! On our return she looked weary, and even faint, so that I was glad when we got in, and then she almost sank on to the sofa, looking very white and ill.

"You must give me the keys, Aunt, and I will get you a glass of wine. Indeed you must need it," I urged.

"Not for worlds, Winnie!" she quickly replied. "I am not very strong now, and a very little tires me; but Anselm does not approve of wine, so I never take it."

"Stuff!" I impatiently exclaimed. "You have always been used to wine, and you miss it now. Please give me the keys."

"Anselm has them," she meekly replied; "so it is impossible."

"Is it? See if I don't get them!" I exclaimed, moving towards the door.

"Oh no! No!" she implored, in such piteous accents, that I hesitated.

"Pray, pray don't!" she urged, in such an agony of entreaty, that, with a gesture of impatience, I yielded, and sat down beside her.

"It is so kind of you to concern yourself about me, dear," she said, softly caressing my hand. "I don't deserve it."

"You *do* deserve it!" I replied.

"If I were more worthy of Anselm—of his affection!" she sighed.

"You are far more worthy of it, than that sister of his! She makes mischief, I am sure," I impetuously exclaimed.

Aunt Jemima sighed again. This sister aided and abetted Mr. Pinchley in all his tyrannous ways, even excelling him, if possible, in meanness. She was in and out constantly, and dined with them about three times a week.

Those dinners! How I abhorred them! Those dreadful cabbages would *not* come to an end; yet, when I reflected that they too, must one day have an ending, like all things mundane, I dreaded lest some other horror might not be substituted, or whether starvation would ensue. Perhaps the gooseberry and currant bushes would then be converted into "Colecannon," or some other abomination. I shuddered at the thought.

And those cabbages *would* thrive, no matter what else might fail; and when Mr. Pinchley cut a cabbage (he always did it himself), he used to shave off all the outer leaves, and cut a cross on the stump; and lo! within a week, baby cabbages would sprout, one in each section of the cross, four to each stump; and they prospered and throve, and grew apace, and were in their turn gathered and boiled. How I loathed those hydra-headed abominations! Though years have passed since then, I have never been able to surmount the rooted aversion I at that time conceived for that vegetable.

Miss Pinchley dined with us that day, so that I was to have the double trial of "Colecannon," and of her company. Poor Aunt Jemima was not only faint and worn out after her walk, but, I could see, nervous at the thought of her sister-in-law's company, and of the combined snubbing she was sure to receive from the brother and sister.

I have said that Miss Pinchley was the exact counterpart of her brother; and so she was, in face, form, voice, and character. She was the elder of the two, and wore spectacles, and a sort of turban; but, put *him* into petticoats, spectacles,

and turban, and you could not have told them apart. She did not like me, I knew, and I was glad of it.

"Virginia," began Mr. Pinchley, after an elaborate grace—which I felt to be a solemn mockery, since no one *could* feel grateful for the supreme nastiness set before one—"Virginia, I believe you have never known a day's illness?"

"Never," replied Miss Pinchley, in sharp and decisive tones.

"And you have always been, more or less, a vegetarian?"

"*And* a tea-totaller," put in Miss Virginia.

"*And* a tea-totaller—yes. Now, see what a fine woman you are! And look at Jemima!"

Poor Aunt Jemima cast down her eyes, in utter self-abasement.

"Jemima has improved in appearance," continued Mr. Pinchley, patronisingly, as though he were speaking to a little girl. "Yes—she certainly has improved, since she has ceased to eat large quantities of meat, and to drink wine in proportion. Yes—she has certainly improved, since she has become more of a vegetarian."

"When you return home, Miss Travers," pursued Miss Pinchley, addressing me, "you can persuade your family to leave off the pernicious custom of indulging in large quantities of meat and wine."

"My mother manages all that," was my rather emphatic reply.

"I should have thought your father would have exercised his prerogative, as head of the house," replied the impertinent, meddling woman.

"My father thinks differently," I curtly replied, trying to keep down my wrath, for Aunt Jemima's sake. "My father thinks it a wife's prerogative, to control the household."

"Um! a mistake!" snapped Miss Virginia.

"Few gentlemen are such admirable managers as dear Anselm," said Aunt Jemima, with a loving glance at her husband.

"I must say I have found you a dutiful wife, Jemima;—according to your lights, of course—according to your lights. I could not expect you to equal Virginia. It would not be fair."

"Of course not, Anselm dear! It would be absurd to suppose it," murmured poor Aunt Jemima, gratified at even this small modicum of praise, so rarely accorded to her.

My wrath was waxing hotter and hotter. At this crisis, a note was brought in, and handed to Mr. Pinchley. It was a bill. His brow clouded over. A storm was at hand! He waited till the servant had left the room; then, white with anger, tossed the bill across to his sister, exclaiming, "What inconceivable extravagance! How am I to meet this?"

Miss Pinchley examined the bill, and ejaculated, "Seventeen-and-sixpence! Why, it's *flinging* away money! *flinging* it away! And I never give more than eight-and-six for 'walking,' and three-and-six for 'house!'"

I saw what it meant, and so did Aunt Jemima, who turned as white as her husband, though not with rage.

"What have you to say for yourself, Madam?" he asked, in the tone of a judge about to sentence a murderer to be hanged, and as though he meant, "Prisoner, have you anything to say, why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

"Indeed Anselm," she tremblingly pleaded, her poor face quivering all over, "I had not a decent pair of walking boots; and they were not so dear as I had been accustomed to have before."

"'*Accustomed?*' '*accustomed?*'" he almost snarled. "Don't talk to me of '*accustomed!*' When a woman marries, she enters upon a different state of things to what she has been *accustomed* to! If she knows her duty, her husband's customs become hers. Madam, your extravagance will ruin me! Do you hear, Madam?"

"Oh Anselm! *don't* look at me in that dreadful way!" piteously cried Aunt Jemima, bursting into a passionate fit of hysterical weeping.

I started to my feet, and, throwing my arms around Aunt Jemima, cried, "Leave him, dear! Come back home with me!"

For a moment there was an awful silence; then the vials of clerical wrath emptied themselves full upon my devoted head.

"You! You!" choking with rage and astonishment. "*You! You!* to come between a husband and wife!"

"Yes," I replied, as calmly as I could; "yes—it is time that *someone* came between Aunt Jemima and you! time that someone took her part, before you have quite killed her!"

"What! What! What!" he gasped.

"When you married her," I pursued, "you took her

from a comfortable, luxurious home, where she had everything to make her happy——."

"Oh ho! very fine!" exclaimed Mr. Pinchley. "A *very* comfortable home, with two unruly fiends of children, who made her life wretched, as she used to tell me, *when* she was in that same comfortable home!"

"That is true," I replied; "but at all events she was her own mistress there, and her money was her own. She could then afford to buy as many pairs of boots as she pleased, without being taken to task."

"*You!* to set yourself up as a mentor! Ah, ha!" laughed Mr. Pinchley, beside himself with rage. "*You*, who have murdered your father and your brother. Neither of them will live to be old!"

The hall bell rang sharply, and the next moment a telegram was handed to me. It was from Mr. Gascoign, and ran thus:—

"Come back at once. Your father is very ill."

My brain reeled. My heart gave a sudden leap. I was giddy—dazed. My anger—where was it?

"I will go back with you, Winnie," said Aunt Jemima. "Come—make haste! Your things can be sent after you; there is no time to pack."

Mr. Pinchley was quiet for a moment, frightened, and awe-stricken. Then he interposed, "Go with her? Are you mad? Can't she go alone?"

"Oh Anselm! for *once*—only this once! Let me have my own way! I beseech you—dear Anselm, I beseech you—let me go and see poor Robert!"

"I forbid you! I command you, on your wifely fealty, not to go!" was the stern rejoinder.

I believe he so loved to have something to tyrannize over, that he really could not be comfortable without her. Then, her presence in the house was necessary to his comfort, inasmuch as the one very young and inexperienced servant, was quite incompetent to do the work of the house, unassisted by Aunt Jemima.

She wrung her hands despairingly, and sobbed, "I will obey you, Anselm."

"Very well. Then you may accompany your niece to the station."

We were soon ready. On leaving, I gave my hand to Mr.

Pinchley, who touched it icily with his fingers. I then turned towards Miss Virginia; but she drew herself up, folded her arms, and frostily protested,——

"Excuse me. I should not feel justified in crossing hands with one who has so grossly outraged my brother's hospitality."

"It does not matter. Come, Aunt," I said. Everything seemed trivial, compared with the great trouble now pressing upon me.

We left the house; and the thought that my bondage was over, and that I might never again come within many miles of that spot, warmed my heart, even at that moment.

We walked as fast as we could, and at times even ran, in hope of catching the train; but we should not have done so, had we not fortunately fallen in with a fly on its way to the station. I have often thought it so strange, that in times of great trial or emergency our observant faculties are sometimes so wonderfully sharpened, and surrounding trifles make an impression on us which they fail to do in our calmer moments. I observed (and hated myself for doing it) that the lining at the side of the fly was torn in an angular jagged tear, and that the button had come off one of the cushions. Looking out of the window, I seemed to notice the few people we passed, with quite a degree of interest. There was a grey-bearded man, walking with a young woman and a little child; and I wondered whether the man was her father, and whether the child was hers or his. Meeting a cart, I noticed that the horse was very thin, and limped on his off hind foot, and I wondered whether he had far to go. I was in a sort of dream; bewildered rather than troubled, dazed, confused, and with a sense of great hurry through it all.

The train was just coming up when we reached the station. Aunt Jemima hurried me into a carriage, and, taking my purse, ran to get my ticket. She confided me to the care of the guard, and before the train started I had only time to say, "God bless you, dear Aunt Jemima!"

We were slowly moving off, when I bethought me to press some money into her hand, and to say, "Take the fly back. Promise!" Through her tears she smiled, and said, "Yes, I will;" and in another minute I had seen the last of her.

It was a very quiet, soft evening. The sun had set, and daylight was fading, though I could still see the outlines of

the trees, tipped with the golden tints of autumn. It looked so calm and peaceful—such a contrast to the scene I had been going through not an hour ago, that, with a changed spirit, I blamed myself for my unguarded outbreak of temper, which had done no good, but only harm, to everyone, especially, I feared, to poor Aunt Jemima. But not for long did I dwell upon that theme; my thoughts flew homewards, with a dreadful longing to know what was happening there. Oh! why had I left home? Why had I been away, when my dearest father was stricken down with illness? True, I had not been a free agent; God knows with what anguish I had left, with what parching thirst I had longed to return. But why had it all been permitted? What possible end in God's providence could it have served? Then came back to me the thought which had lately grown so strong within me,—"All things work together for good;" and I felt my absence from home had been of some benefit to me, since it had strengthened me in self-control and self-denial, in which I had always been so sadly wanting. "Yes," I thought, "it was necessary—it was right."

Then I fell to musing on all that Mr. Gascoign had said about "things working together for good;" and that set me thinking how kind he had been to me, and what comfort he had given me; and it seemed that my leaving home had even in that way been a gain, for now I knew that he would always be my firm friend—and *such* a friend! one, who would candidly tell me of my faults, not from the love of finding fault, or from any dislike to me personally, as Mr. Pinchley did, but from taking a real interest in my welfare, and from a wish for my true happiness. Twilight had deepened into dusk, dusk into darkness, and two hours had passed away out of the three that the journey would occupy; when the engine whistled, and the brakes were applied, and we rushed in amongst the lights of a station; then stopped. I heard the guard say, "Miss Travers? Yes, Sir," and the next moment Mr. Gascoign stepped into the carriage. Before I could ask the question that trembled upon my lips, he had answered it. Taking both my hands in his, he said, "He is better." Then he sat down quietly, to let me recover myself, for he knew that my heart was full. I could only *think*, "Thank God! thank God!" and it was not for some minutes that I could say, "How can I thank you for this comfort? I

should have been in dread and anxiety for a whole hour longer, but for you!"

"I remembered that," he replied; "and I would have gone on farther to meet you, but that I feared to pass you on the road, as I knew that your train would not stop for several stations before it came to this."

Then he told me about my poor father; how he had suddenly been seized with an attack of the heart, and had been in great danger; but that Dr. Gillias now gave some hope. He added, "We all blamed ourselves for having sent you to the Pinchleys."

"Oh no, indeed it was for the best. There was a needs-be," I replied, smiling, for I could smile now.

"Could you feel it, when you got the telegram?" he asked.

"I felt nothing then. I had lost my temper—horribly, and was in the midst of what I am afraid I can only call a 'row' with Mr. Pinchley, when it came. I felt stunned—bewildered, that was all."

"I am sorry you have had a row with Pinchley—very sorry," he observed. "How did it happen?"

I told him all that had happened since my arrival at the "Chestnuts." (By the way, I never could discover why the house was so called, unless for the reason that there was not a chestnut-tree near it, nor one within a couple of miles). He listened quietly, and then said, that he should have lost his temper long before I did, and that the presence of Miss Virginia in addition to that of her brother, must have opened a fine field for the exercise of all the Christian virtues.

"Still," I said, "my loss of temper did no good to Aunt Jemima."

"I don't know that," he said; "a bully ought now and then to be bearded to his face, and told in plain words what he has done, and what others think of his conduct. But, just because he *is* a bully, a woman, unless a veritable shrew, is no match for him. He requires a man to deal with him."

"Yes, but no man was there."

"Why did you not write to me?"

"I *did* so wish that business would have brought you there! I would have asked you to speak to him," I replied.

"Why not have written? I would have come."

"Would you? How kind! But I should not—should not have liked."

"Why?"

I was puzzled for an answer; and on being further pressed, could only say, rather shyly, that I did not know. To change the subject, I abruptly asked how they all were at home, particularly Ben.

"They are all well," he replied; "Ben, especially so. If only he can be kept from fresh cold this winter, and cease growing so rapidly, all may yet be well."

"Yet be well?" As I echoed his words, my heart sank. "Have you, too, feared that Ben would not live? I know Mamma has thought so sometimes."

"We all have thought so, except your father. The knowledge would be dangerous to his health, for his life seems wrapped up in Ben's."

"Surely, surely," I faltered, "Mr. Pinchley was not right in saying that I had shortened Ben's life?"

"No; he was utterly wrong in saying so. Ben's former illness had nothing whatever to do with this. He quite recovered from that in a few months."

"Then why is there any fear?"

"Gillias says that the seeds of his mother's malady were in him at his birth, and that his recent too rapid growth has weakened him considerably. He thinks too, with me, that Ben will never be fit for a man's career; his excessive delicacy of constitution, and over refined sensibility, would make the inevitable jars of life a torture to him. He would not be a happy man."

I sighed heavily, but would not agree with him. I mentally decided that *I* could make Ben's life a happy one, that *I* could avert from him the jars of life, and that I would!

In silence we passed the remainder of the journey. A groom came to the window on our arrival at the station, with the welcome tidings, "All's well, Miss;" and stepping into the carriage, we drove off, and were soon whirling up the avenue as fast as the horses could trot. With what happiness was I clasped in my mother's arms, then in Ben's! With what rapture did I hear my mother's voice, always sweet, and, it seemed to me, never so sweet as now, repeat the words, "All is well."

CHAPTER XVII.

A MONTH had passed, and autumn was drawing to a close. Ben and I were more than ever all in all to each other; yet not quite that either, for our dear father was now if possible more precious, in that we feared the day might not be very far off, when the loving smile might no more light upon us, the gentle voice no more sound in tender greeting.

For Dr. Gillias gave us little hope. He said that the disease had gained ground, and that "it was only a question of time." Yet, when our father now and then seemed to brighten up, to shake off some of his languor, and to speak with a stronger voice, we would have it—Ben and I—that he was recovering. Our mother, I saw, could not so deceive herself; her face wore a look of settled sadness. Mr. Gascoign was much with our father, and he used to look at him with a yearning intensity of expression, that told me *he* did not deceive himself either.

One day I was sitting beside Papa's easy chair, in the library. A little work lay in my lap, but my fingers were still, for Papa's eyes were closed, and, thinking he slept, I feared the noise of the needle might waken him. But he raised his eyes, and spoke.

"Winnie, my child, it is so pleasant to me, to see you sitting there with that work. I once thought you would never take to feminine pursuits—that you would grow up, a fast, unfeminine woman, like Alicia Ferrers."

"Who was she, Papa?"

"I thought you had heard of her, my dear. She was a cousin of mine, and one of the handsomest (and boldest) women I have ever known. She was a fascinating, brilliant creature; and Gascoign (there is no harm in speaking of it after so many years) was quite fascinated by her, when a young man of twenty-five."

"Yes; go on, please, Papa."

"She was a shocking flirt, and used to draw men on, to propose, out of sheer vanity and love of excitement."

"Oh Papa! But that is wicked, downright wicked, you

know! And not only wicked, but shameful—something to be so dreadfully ashamed of!"

"I am glad to hear you say so, darling."

"But Papa, you never thought I would behave in that way, when I grew up to be a woman, did you?"

"At one time, I hardly knew what you would grow up, my dear. Certainly, I never should have dared to hope you would have become what you are—my pride and my delight!"

"Oh Papa! are you proud of me?"

"Indeed I am, dear child. And so happy in you."

"Papa, how glad you make me feel! Then I have quite atoned for that time?"

"More than atoned, my darling. You have become a really loveable woman; full of all gentle and winning ways, and with quiet habits of self-control and self-denial, that delight me very much."

"It is all Mamma's work, dearest Father," I pleaded, raising his hand to my lips.

"You have helped her well, my dear," he said, "with all your heart, and soul, and strength. Had you not done so, your mother would have worked and suffered in vain."

"Dearest Father," I said, "if you knew how you reward me!"

"I am glad, my child. I have watched you, seen all your struggles to conquer your faults of temper and disposition. I have seen you resist and triumph over one temptation after another. It has been such a comfort to me, through all my illness!"

"Oh Papa, how good God is!"

My heart was too full, for anything but gratitude.

"Winnie dear, I should like, while I am able, to speak to you on a subject that is very near my heart."

"Yes, Papa."

"My cousin, Ralph Beresford, would, you know, have come into the estate, but for me; and had Ben never been born, his son Harold would have stepped in on my death."

"Yes, Papa, I know,"

"Of course, if your Uncle Dick had married and had had a family, his sons would have succeeded on my death, if Ben had never been born. As the entail stands, however, Ben will inherit the estate on my death."

I could not bear to hear him speak so; but I answered very quietly, "Yes, Papa."

"I was very fond of Ralph," he continued; "and when he died, it was as if I had lost a dear brother. It was a pet scheme with us, that when Harold grew up, he and you should marry, if you both wished it. Then, if Ben never married (as I put it), or if he did not live (as Ralph put it), your children would inherit the Elms, and the estate would still be in the family. By the way, dear, there is a curious clause in the entail, whereby, in case both Ben and Harold died without sons, and you married and had sons, your sons would succeed to the estate."

"Do you wish me to marry this Harold, Papa?" I asked, with a chilled, sinking heart.

"Not unless you could love him, my child."

"Then I am sure I never shall!" I exclaimed.

"Why, you have never seen him dear," said Papa. "How can you tell, whether you would like him or not?"

I felt that I coloured painfully—at what, I hardly knew; but I asked, "Where is this Harold, Papa?"

"After his father's death, he went abroad, and I lost sight of him."

"You are quite sure, dear Papa, that you don't wish me to marry him?" I again asked.

"Quite sure, dear. I should like you, some day, to marry a good man, whom you could love so well, as to feel that you could not be quite happy away from him, and that trouble and privation would fall lightly upon you, if shared with him. I should like you to marry one, who would be a guide and counsellor in all good ways, a faithful reprover where reproof was needed. Harold *may* be such a one."

Silence followed. Then I said, "Tell me the end of the story about Alicia Ferrers."

"Oh, Gascoign was wild about her—quite infatuated. I rather think she liked him; at all events, she led him on to propose——."

"Oh! I am sorry!" I exclaimed.

"But from his boyhood he had chosen the profession of the Church, which I hold to be the most glorious under the sun."

"Yes, Papa, if rightly followed."

"Of course, dear. Well, Alicia accepted him."

"That made him very happy, I suppose, Papa."

"No, my dear; he thought he *loved* her, while he was only infatuated by her beauty and grace."

"Are not people always infatuated, when they love?"

"No, dear; love should be based on reason, as well as fancy."

"Well, Papa?"

"He loved and admired her beautiful face, her fine form, but he neither loved nor admired her soul."

"Father, I should not feel satisfied (if I *were* to marry) with such affection as that."

"No indeed, my dear, for such love soon dies out. Well, Alicia had a habit of mocking at all that is true and noble and good; nay, at length she contracted a way of deriding even that which was sacred, because she considered it witty and *fast;* she aimed at being fast, and she liked to shock Gerald by talking 'slang,' at times—just as you used to do, child. How it jarred upon me!"

"Dear Father!"

"Day by day, Gerald grew more and more displeased. Alicia liked to display her power over him before others, and one day she went so far as to jest about the Bible, saying, that 'it was all written by a parcel of snuffy old Jews, who did not know what they were writing about,' etc. etc. Gerald left the room. The next day they had a dreadful quarrel; and after that, they did not speak or meet for some weeks. Gerald was the first to seek a reconciliation. This so elated Alicia, that she declared she would not marry him, unless he gave up the Church; that 'she hated the Church, and all parsons.' Gerald left her, and had a sharp struggle between his love (as he thought it) and his reason. The latter triumphed. He and Alicia never met again. She married, and died a few years afterwards. Ever since then, he has abhorred a fast woman, or one who talked 'slang.'"

I felt now, why Mr. Gascoign had once seemed to dislike me so much. My father continued.

"Now child, you possess this wonderful gift of beauty; and remember, it *is* a gift, and you have to thank God for it, just as you have to thank Him for health, or wealth, or talent, or any other good gift. But you have no more right to be vain of it, than you have to be of any of His gifts. Remember that it is so perishable! Alicia Ferrers lost her beauty. She was stricken with small-pox, some few years before her death.

Her beauty gone, what remained? If she had possessed the greater charm of *goodness*, the loss of beauty would have been comparatively endurable. It was said, she died of a broken heart."

"Did Mr. Gascoign fret about her?"

"No, dear. Long before that, he had realized the truth, that he had mistaken mere fancy, for love."

So, this was what Mr. Gascoign had thought of, when he had said, he had once found it almost impossible to believe that all things worked together for good!

This talk with my father, left me very sad and thoughtful; sad, because he evidently thought he would not be much longer with us; and thoughtful, on many accounts.

A few more days passed away, and Papa was looking so much better, that Ben and I began to feel quite happy about him. He had a bright look in his eyes, and a colour in his cheeks, and, save that a certain anxious expression had intensified, as it were, he seemed to be quite free from pain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was a pleasant serene day, followed by a soft tranquil evening. Dr. Gillias and Mr. Gascoign were dining with us. Papa was in such good spirits, and seemed so much stronger, that Ben and I felt quite angry with Dr. Gillias for not being so merry as we all were; but Ben suggested that perhaps "some patient lay heavy on his mind;" so we forgave him.

After dinner, Ben and I strolled out into the grounds, as usual, while Mr. Gascoign and the Doctor retired to the smoking-room, and our father and mother went into the drawing-room, for their usual evening talk; he, resting on the sofa, she seated beside him. There we found them, when we came in to tea. Mr. Gascoign and Dr. Gillias soon joined us; and when tea was over, the Doctor drew from his pocket a magazine, in which, he said, was a little story which he would read to us, "if we were all very good." On our assurance that we all came up to the required standard, he began to read.

"TWO SOULS.

"One was in the flesh, the other out of the flesh. The one was incapable of bodily or mental pain; free, as air, to come, or go, walk, run, or fly, as she listed, happy in the knowledge that her blessed state was safe from death. Death lay behind her; endless life stretched out before her.

"The other was coated in a heavy body of flesh, which clogged her movements and her thoughts, quenched her purest aspirations, inflicted upon her aches and pains innumerable, filled her with dread of the future, and, most of all, of death. Death was before her, and must be met; life was behind her, and was fleeting farther and farther away.

"Her sister soul looked pityingly on—pityingly and wonderingly, and tried to make her presence seen or felt by her still loved earthly friend, but in vain. Those fleshly eyes could not see the pure spiritual creature who was so close to her; those fleshly ears could not hear; that fleshly brain could not conceive.

"The newly released soul sought council from one, long an inmate of the Land of Life, and who, like all disenthralled

spirits, had grown and increased in spiritual knowledge, in proportion to the time that had passed away since she had been freed.

"'Why,' asked the novice, 'why cannot I make myself known to my friend, who mourns for me as dead—strange word, when I have but just begun to live! Why cannot I comfort her, by telling her that I am in the Land of Life?'

"'She is too earth-bound,' replied the older spirit. 'Some of the poor enthralled ones are more ethereal than others—less closely bound by those dreadful chains. They sometimes get glimpses of the freed ones, but only glimpses; and when they tell their fellow captives what they have seen, they call them mad, or say they are ill, and persuade them that it is but fancy.'

"Still the happy, freed soul, hovered about her old friend's path, and tried to comfort her, but in vain; so she returned once more to the wiser spirit, and again asked, 'Is there *no* way?'

"The older spirit replied, 'When you have been longer in Life, you will not concern yourself about the earth-clad. You will feel that their life is such a speck in time—that their deliverance is so close at hand,—it matters not if they chafe a little in their bonds. You cannot feel this yet, but you will soon.'

"'But,' still urged the younger one, 'is there *no* way? You have told me, that they who have received kindness from their fellow captives in the Death World, are privileged to comfort the benefactors whom they leave in bondage.'

"'There are many ways. I will tell you one. You must know, that in sleep, the spirit escapes from its earth-body, and roams hither and thither, free to a certain extent, yet still shackled, as it were, by a chain which drags it back to rejoin the earth-body the instant it wakes. Sometimes it is permitted to the inhabitant of the Life World, then, to meet, in spirit, his or her spirit, whose body still lingers in the Death World, and to comfort them, though it be but in a dream.'

"'But,' argued the novice, would it not be possible for the absentee from the death-body, to return to its prison no more?'

"'Not without the permission of the All-Gracious,' replied the other, bowing her head at the name.

"'Does He ever give permission?'"

"'Sometimes; when He, who knows all, knows that the

poor mortal is ready for happiness here, and that nothing but sorrow awaits him upon earth, then He snaps the thread that binds the unwilling soul to its body of death; and the cry goes forth on earth, that he has 'died in his sleep!' Nay, but he has *come to life* in his sleep!'

"'May I thus visit my friend, to-night?'

"'You may try; I know not whether you will be permitted to succeed.'

"'In what other way could I console the poor earth-bound one?'

"'You can whisper words of comfort, which the poor deaf one will not hear, but will feel. You can to some extent make your presence *felt;* so that if she is spiritually minded, she will say, 'I feel as though my friend's spirit were here, very close to me.'

"So, that night, when the earth-bound slept, her spirit wandered forth, and lo! she saw advancing towards her, the form of her lost friend. She was the same, and yet not the same; so beautiful, so bright, so joyous. The captive almost feared to touch her, lest that touch might chill her; but the Child of Life laid a soft warm hand on hers, and said, 'Aimée, do not fear; we spirits have the same bodies we had on earth.'

"'How?' replied the Child of Death. 'Do they not tell us, that flesh and blood cannot enter Heaven?'

"'They do say so, and it is true; every word that they tell you is true: only, you earth-bound ones do not understand the Words of Wisdom in the right sense.'

"'Tell me,' said Aimée, 'tell me more.'

"The Life-born resumed; 'You read, in the great Book, that there is an earthly body, and there is a spiritual body. What does that mean?'

"'I never understood.'

"I will tell you. This body which I have now, this bright, beautiful, painless, deathless body, was mine on earth, but covered over with an outer husk, a coarse and ugly rind, the earthly body, subject to pain, fatigue, sickness, death. That cast off, never lives again.'

"'Not at the last day?'

"'No; read again from the great Book, and, with new light you will see, that though we have to give account in the body for deeds done in the flesh, it is *this* body which *I* have, which is meant; not yours, which soon decays, and, turning into gas,

and flowers, and fruit, and vegetables, and animal life, never could rise again. If it did, think what would happen. At the last trump, all life would fly into pieces, and become something different from itself; and this, for generations back; since one man alone is made up of an infinitude of other men, and of beasts, fishes, birds, besides other things innumerable!'

"'You amaze me!'

"'My once cherished, but now abhorred, body, was buried, as you know. Already part of it has become grass, which, eaten by a cow, has become a portion of that animal. Some of it, in the form of gas, has mingled with the air, been purified, and has been inhaled by human beings, thus entering into their blood. In time, my former body will have entered so entirely into the composition of other matter, that, to recall it the last day, would be, to cause the violent disentegration of, possibly, some hundreds of creatures, whether human, animal, or vegetable, is not of much consequence. But suppose, that instead of dying (as you call it), quietly in my bed, I had been killed on the field of battle, or drowned, or burnt to death in a house, or eaten up by cannibals?'

"'It is wonderful,' murmured the earth-child. 'But why are these things hidden from us?'

"'They are not hidden. Read the great Book—the Book of Life—the Book of Wisdom—and see whether this is not all set forth.'

"'I will. And will you come again to comfort me? Ah! I am dragged away—away——.'

"The body had awoke; and the poor earth-bound spirit had to obey its call. Aimée could hardly believe that she lay there, yet in the body, in her little white draped bed, that earthly roses peeped in at her window, and that earthly birds carolled so brightly without. But at last she murmured, 'Ah! only a dream!'

"Each night she met her spirit friend in sleep; and the sweet comfort that she brought her, gladdened her heart all through the weary day. Yes, weary; for the earth-body had now grown weak, and she could no more roam abroad in the bright sunshine; and each morning, when she woke, she sighed, 'Another day!' But with sweet patience she bore it all, and grew weaker and weaker, till at last they said, 'She is dying,' not knowing that she was just entering upon life.

"One night, when talking to her friend in Spirit Land, she

thought she felt herself gently pulled. The touch was so slight, that she hardly knew whether it was her body that called her, or whether the thread had broken; but her friend said 'Go. It is for the last time. The thread has nearly snapped.'

"So she once more opened her weary eyes upon the earth. Watchers were around her bed, and she smiled upon them, and said, 'she had had such a pleasant dream.' As the day wore on, she grew weaker and weaker, and the doctor said she would not live through the night. The watchers wept and moaned, but she smiled brightly upon them, and bade them not to weep, for she was going to be so happy! And then, soon after night fell, she slept, and was again in Spirit Land.

"While talking with her friend, she felt a sudden shock, very slight, and not painful; and instantly, her whole being was flooded with a sense of life, and strength, and joy, such as she had never imagined it possible to feel.

"'The thread has snapped! You are free! You have entered upon life!' said her friend.

But the watchers around her bed, wept, and wailed, and pressed their lips upon a motionless form that lay there, and which, to them, seemed the form of Aimée. And they moaned in anguish, and sobbed, 'She is dead!'"

"To some people, it might appear a strange sort of theory," said Dr. Gillias; "but I think it helps to make intelligible, a great deal of what we read, about the natural body and the spiritual body, and of our being judged in the body, and such passages. I do like any theory that helps to shew us, that there is *literal* truth in certain passages of the Bible."

"It's very nice," said Ben; "it is such a comfort, to think that we shall carry away our *real selves*. Then, it is so nice, to think that it does not matter about our bodies decaying in the grave, as it is only our shell or husk. Do you think it is true, Papa?"

"I have often thought it very likely to be true. What do you think, Gascoign?"

"Without going so far as to say, that I quite believe in the soul's power to wander out of the body in sleep, I still think that possible. But, as to the spiritual body being within us, or around us, perhaps, I think that highly probable, and am the more inclined to the belief, as it appears to reconcile so many apparent difficulties in the Bible."

"*I* believe it," said Ben, with emphasis; "Mamsey, what do you think?"

"I think it a doctrine full of comfort," replied our mother.

"A doctrine! Mamma?" I asked.

"Yes dear, if it can be drawn from the Bible itself."

"Music, dear Helen," pleaded our father; "this talk has reminded me of that song you sing sometimes——"

"'Three sisters?'—Yes," said our mother; and she sang:—

THREE SISTERS.

Three sisters from this Earth have gone,
Three hearts that death has joined in one.
Theirs was a love that loves for ever,
A three-fold cord that naught could sever.

There were two watchers round a bed,
And one wept sore, and shudd'ring said,
Mid sobs and sighing,
"Is there no hope? And must we part?
It cannot be! Break, break, my heart!
Alas! she's dying!

"Oh Death! aim not thy poisoned shaft,
Till the full cup of life she's quaffed!
To die so young!
So bright and fair, and full of glee,
Of life, and hope, and joy, was she,
To love, so strong!"

The other neither sobbed nor sighed.
What need for grief? for she had died,
And knew that death
Was but the entrance into life,
The ceasing of pain, toil, and strife,
With the last breath.

"Sweet! can you see me yet?" she said,
Low bending o'er the golden head
So fair and still.
"Love! can you hear me speak? I'm here,
Can you yet feel that I am near,
And nearer still?"

"I see! I hear!" The weary eyes,
Met hers at last,
Lit up with fond and glad surprise,
Then faded fast.
The sweet eyes closed; one sigh, one moan,
And she was gone.
The soul was free; the earth-bound one
Was left alone.

In swoon she lay, so still and deep ;
Did she yet breathe ? or did she sleep,
The sleep of death ?
When she had fallen to the ground,
Had her soul leaped forth at the sound
Of that last breath ?

Howe'er it was, a vision bright
Came floating, softly clad in light,
To where she lay.
Two forms she knew, so fresh and fair,
Lit up the darkness of the air,
Then sped away.

And as they went, a song she heard,
Like the gay singing of a bird,
A song so sweet !
" Oh ! mourn not ! for we are not dead !
We have but entered life !" they said,
" We soon shall meet !"

The vision faded, and again,
She woke to heavy grief and pain,
And weary sighing ;
And when they found her there alone,
They said, " Alas ! poor stricken one !
She too is dying !"

Three grassy mounds together laid,
Three yew-trees planted in the shade,
Three happy ones go hand in hand,
Rejoicing, in the Spirit-land.

After a short pause, Papa asked for something of Bach's; then, for the " Moonlight Sonata," and after that, something from Handel's " Messiah."

The last notes had just died away, and our mother had risen from the piano; when our father cried out, in a changed voice, " Helen ! Helen ! I am going!"

She was beside him in an instant, and just caught the words, " So happy !" as he closed his eyes, and his head dropped on her shoulder.

Dr. Gillias raised his hand to command quiet, then felt the pulse. It had ceased to beat.

CHAPTER XIX.

TIME passed away, and brought little change that could be felt, beside the one great change that had fallen upon us, in the loss of that presence which had been with us since we could remember anything. We loved to think, that he might still be amongst us, though unseen; and we so cherished this thought, that we never said or did anything that we knew would have pained him when he was on earth. We pursued our studies as of old, and said to each other, that we were working for Papa. Still, there were times when our hearts sank within us; when we longed to hear his voice, and meet his old sweet smile. It was so long—so long ago.

Our dear mother bore up bravely, and seemed even more anxious to do her part by us, than she had been when our father was on earth; but her old brightness was dimmed, and the sweet sadness of her smile, and the silver threads sown among her hair, told their own tale.

But, one day, nearly twelve months after Papa's death, our quiet was invaded by the arrival of a visitor, whose card was brought in to my mother. She read it.

"Oh!" she said, "it is your Cousin Harold." And the next moment, he entered.

A tall, dark young man; handsome, decidedly, and with a fine figure; but with a certain freedom and boldness of manner, which made me rather shrink from him. He shook hands with mamma, and then giving me a long stare, exclaimed, "You must be my cousin Winnie. Cousin, give me a kiss."

"Excuse me, No," I replied, in a tone which damped his ardour; for he said,

"Oh! hang it! No offence, Winnie. I thought I ought to, that's all."

"Certainly not. It was not at all necessary," I replied, in a tone that made him draw back, and say, "I haven't offended you, have I? If so, I am sorry."

This was said so frankly, and good-heartedly, that I replied,

"Not at all. I am sure you did not mean to be rude."

"Was I 'rude?'" he asked, speaking quite softly.

"Indeed you were."

"I *am* so sorry. But you will shake hands, won't you, to show that you forgive me?"

"Of course I will," I replied, at once giving him my hand.

"Is this your brother?" he next asked, surveying Ben with interest.

"Yes, your cousin Ben," I replied.

"Shake hands, Ben," he said.

Ben complied; but I saw that he shrank from Harold's touch. Contact with anything at all rough, was dreadfully painful to Ben; in truth, he was not fit for the world, where he, notwithstanding all our care, must unavoidably have to rub against so much that was rough and coarse. Often did I weep, when I looked forward to my brother's future. Ah me! that future was wisely ordered for Ben's happiness!

Our cousin had put up at the inn; but our mother insisted on his taking up his quarters with us, as long as he stayed at Elmsleigh. I felt certain that my father had told her his views with regard to Harold and me; and I thought her invitation was prompted by a wish to study Harold's character closely; also, perhaps, in order that I might be thrown into companionship with my cousin.

He, poor fellow, was a good-hearted, unselfish creature, impetuous to a fault, uncultured, unrefined, perhaps; but with something about him, that might have captivated many girls, yet, somehow, did not fascinate me. When he had been staying with us about a fortnight, my mother one day broached the subject.

"Winnie dear, your papa told me he had spoken to you about Harold."

"I thought so, Mother."

"Do you think you might one day like to marry Harold?"

"No, I am sure I should not!" I empathically replied.

"Do not be in a hurry to decide, my child. Harold's character may not be of the very highest type——."

"I should think not," I exclaimed.

"— But he is good-hearted, generous, unselfish. There is nothing mean about him. Gerald agrees with me."

"Oh Mamma, surely, *surely* you have not told Mr. Gascoign?" I cried reproachfully.

"Your father did, my dear. Why not?"

"If my dear father did, it was of course right," I said, bursting into tears.

"He consulted Gerald about everything, you know, dear."

"Yes, yes, Mother. And what did Mr. Gascoign think?"

"He agreed with your father, that if it could be brought about, it would be a happy thing for you, my dear."

"He did?" I cried.

"Yes, dear, and he now says Harold is a fine fellow, and that if you like him, you might be very happy as his wife."

"Oh Mother! Mother!" I bitterly exclaimed, "you are all against me!"

"No, dear, why say that? Gerald and I think, that as you must marry some day——."

"Why *must* I?" I proudly demanded. "Is marriage the ne-plus-ultra of female bliss? I, for one, do not think so! I can conceive it possible to be far happier, unmarried! I intend always to live with Ben."

"Ah love, suppose Ben were taken from you! And I too! It might be. And then, think of your lonely life!"

My arms were around her directly. "Oh Mother, dearest! don't talk in that fearful way! What husband could ever be to me, what you are!"

She smiled, and then said, "But what about Harold?"

"Time enough," I replied, "when Harold is in love with me."

So the subject ended for that day; but I was troubled. I felt vexed, grieved, mortified, I knew not why. A sort of hitch had come into my life, and I felt as if I had lost something. I was angry with myself and everybody—except Ben, whose never-failing well of sympathy, now overflowed for me.

"To think that our darling mamsey should consider Harold good enough for you, my precious Winnie?" he exclaimed. "And as for Mr. Gascoign—well, I *am* surprised! and I *did* think that he——." Ben stopped.

For the first and only time, since our return home, I spoke sharply to Ben, saying,

"Never mind what you *did* think, Ben! *I* think that everybody is turning match-maker at my expense! Let me hear no more of it!"

"Oh Winnie!" he said.

It was enough. I accused myself of cruelty to my dear Ben, and begged him to forgive me.

"But the truth is," I pleaded, "I feel angry with anyone who even hints at my marrying, because, my darling Ben, you know that you and I are always to live together."

At that, the dear child's face flushed all over with joy, and he made a little confession, that he had often been fretted at the thought, that perhaps I might after all marry when I grew up, and he so dreaded being parted from me, that he had often prayed God would take him away before that time came; but that, if I was *quite* sure I would be happier unmarried, he thought it would be a blessed life for him and for me.

Still, I felt a sort of soreness, a bruised feeling, when I thought how Mr. Gascoign had said, it would be a good thing for me and Harold to marry. I set it down to mortified vanity, at the thought that anyone should class me in the same category with poor rough, uncouth cousin Harold; and then I took myself to task for intolerable conceit, in fancying myself one whit better than my cousin. But still the feeling remained. I wished Mr. Gascoign would give me the opportunity of telling him, that I had long ago decided on living to the end of my life with Ben, and that no one need trouble themselves with matrimonial projects about me. Mr. Gascoign, however, had hardly been in the house for the last fortnight, and on the one or two occasions when he had looked in, had hurried off almost directly. There was much sickness in the village, and he was very busy.

Meanwhile my poor cousin was, I feared, becoming quite fond of me. I wished he would go, before matters grew serious; but he seemed resolved on staying.

It was late one afternoon, when I bent my steps homewards from the village. Dusk was falling fast, and, unaccustomed to be out after dark, I hurried on. When I came to where two paths met on a turn, I heard a footstep, and Mr. Gascoign stood before me. I was conscious of giving him my hand coldly; and was angry with myself for it, when too late.

"I am going your way," he said; "shall I see you home?"

"Thank you," I replied; and we walked on.

Somehow, from one thing to another, the conversation at last fell upon cousin Harold; and Mr. Gascoign spoke out.

"It is time you made up your mind, Winnie," he said; "I don't think you would trifle with any man's affections, would you?"

"Harold has given me no right to think I have gained his," I proudly replied.

"Then, if he did give you that right?" he asked, with a nonchalance that goaded me terribly.

"Oh, if he *did*—" I answered, trying to imitate his coolness.

"You would accept him?" he asked.

"Would you advise it?" was my rejoinder.

"If you cared for him,—certainly."

"Well, perhaps I might," I answered, more carelessly than before.

A long silence. Then Mr. Gascoign said, "He is a fine young fellow; no meanness nor falsehood about him. He is truth itself."

My evil genius was in the ascendant, as I answered, "Yes, and he *is* so handsome!"

We had reached the lodge gates. Mr. Gascoign said, "Goodbye, Winnie;" and, having seen me into my own territory, left me.

I was vexed, troubled beyond expression, angry too. "Yes," I thought, "Ben is my one stand-by. Ben will never fail me! Even Mr. Gascoign, who has known me so long, and has seemed such a friend, ready to give me up to the first booby that asks for me!"

Poor cousin Harold! As if to reproach me, he appeared at the moment, coming down the long avenue towards me. "Oh cousin Winnie!" he cried, "here you are at last! I've been so frightened about you!"

"Mr. Gascoign has just left me," I replied. "There was no fear."

"Why don't you take me with you, cousin? I wouldn't be in your way, you know. I would wait outside places for you as long as you liked, and never get tired."

Poor Harold! he so reminded me of an affectionate mammoth, that I laughed, and reproached myself for my late ill-temper.

"So the parson saw you home, cousin Winnie?" asked Harold.

"Mr. Gascoign was so kind," I answered.

"How that parson could have been with you for so long, and not be in love with you, I can't for the life of me imagine," pursued poor maladroit Harold.

"Mr. Gascoign considers me a child," said I.

"Cousin," he timidly began.

"Well, Harold?"

"My father told me, before he died, that—No, I won't say it to-day."

And the dreaded avowal was warded off for that time. Thinking over it, I was grieved about my poor cousin Harold. He was so kind and good. Why could I not love him?

I told myself, it was because I had made up my mind to live for Ben, and never to marry.

Another fortnight passed, and still Harold lingered and lingered; and I had grown quite fond of him, quite sorry when he talked of leaving, yet still not inclined to marry him. One day he sought me in the garden, and I knew that he had resolved to seal his doom; for he seized my hand, and drew it within his arm, saying, "I must speak to you, cousin Winnie! Come further from the house."

My heart was beating fast, but with dread, not pleasure. When we were farther off, he began. "Cousin, I was going to tell you once before, how my father and your father——."

"Don't tell it yet, Harold—pray, pray!" I entreated.

"I must! I must! Oh Winnie, they wanted you and me to marry! Cousin Winnie, dear cousin Winnie, I've never seen the girl I cared to marry, till I met you! I love you so, that I would die, only to hear the words from you, 'Harold, I love you!'"

"I cannot say those words, poor Harold," I sighed.

"Couldn't you love me a little—just a little, to begin with? I would be content, dear, and not ask you to marry me for ever so long," pleaded the poor fellow.

"I *do* love you, Harold, very much; but I will not marry you—nor anyone," I replied.

"Not even the parson? Oh Winnie, sometimes I am afraid you love the parson!"

"Don't say the 'parson,' Harold. If you mean Mr. Gascoign, call him by his name," I evasively answered.

"Well, I will. But oh, Winnie, I hope you don't care for him?"

"Neither for him, nor anyone," I impatiently exclaimed. "I mean to remain single, and live with Ben."

"Oh Winnie, don't be so determined! Give me a little bit of hope to live on!" he pleaded. "Let me try to make you love me! May I?"

"Yes, Harold, you may," I replied.

"And will you promise not to set yourself against me, dear Winnie?"

"Yes, you poor, foolish Harold," I replied, pitying the poor fellow from my heart.

"I have to go away to-night, Winnie; my mother wants me on business. I have sent on my traps to the station, and said goodbye to all; so now I will go."

"Goodbye, dear Harold," I said. I was grieved to part with the poor fellow.

"Won't you let me kiss you, Winnie—just as a brother might? I am so miserable."

The tears stood in his great, sad eyes. I was moved.

"Yes, Harold," I said, resolving to tell my mother directly I saw her.

So the poor desolate giant stooped his head, and kissed my cheek, quite timidly, and then strode away.

But, at the moment he was bestowing upon me that brotherly kiss, I heard a foot-step quite close, and Mr. Gascoign appeared. He must have seen; but I did not care, as there was no secresy in the matter.

I was just wiping away a tear or two—for I felt poor Harold's trouble keenly—when Mr. Gascoign came up and stopped before me. He stood still one moment, gazing upon me with an expression I had never before seen in his eyes; a sort of withering look of scorn, or anger, or sorrow, I could not tell which. Then, without a word, he turned away, and was gone.

I found my mother in the drawing-room, with Ben and—yes, oh joy! good Mrs. Thatcher, who, after many times promising to come, and disappointing us, had at last arrived.

"Dear me! Dear me! who'd have thought it!" she exclaimed, lifting her hands. "Why, I shouldn't have known you, Miss Winnie, you're that grown! and so much of a woman too!"

"Well, of course, dear granny," (so we called her now), "you forget that it is some time since you saw me last, and that I am now nearly eighteen."

"*To* be sure!" she said. "And my dear little man, here? He's not much changed, though he is that grown too."

"Yes, he grows too fast," I said, "and it weakens him. But we would not mind, only for his cough, which makes him so thin."

Mrs. Thatcher gazed anxiously at Ben, and asked whether he had long been troubled with this cough. Mamma answered, that it came on in the autumn, and lasted through the winter. About a week ago, we had had a few days of east wind, which had made Ben's cough worse, so that he was now confined to

the house. Mrs. Thatcher said nothing; but I saw the tears gather in her eyes as she gazed on him.

Ben's cough was worse than usual that evening; so much so, that we put him to bed, and applied a plaister to his chest. Mrs. Thatcher spoke to us afterwards about Ben, and asked whether Dr. Gillias did not recommend his going abroad next winter. We fancied she thought very seriously of his state.

The next day brought no amendment in Ben; so we sent for Dr. Gillias, who at once pronounced that he had inflammation of the lungs. The day passed, and Ben seemed no better. The doctor was in and out constantly. Towards evening, he said that he would rather not leave, but would lie down on the library sofa, to be at hand, if wanted. To our agonized questions, he only replied, that there was acute inflammation, and that the fever ran high at present. We asked what was the cause of this attack? Any imprudence? Any thing that might have been prevented? No, he replied, Ben's lungs had been affected for some time past. This illness, though of course partly due to the weather, was merely the natural course of the disease.

In a week Ben was better, and was able to be moved on to the sofa, before his bed-room fire. We got all the nice books we could think of, and read to him; but he liked nothing better, than to have Mrs. Thatcher in his room, and to hear all her stories about Kimberton, and the Crown and Anchor, and Jack and Keziah, and little Jack and little Keziah, whose wonderful sayings and doings were the delight of the fond old grandmother.

When a fortnight had passed, and the doctor pronounced Ben out of immediate danger, Mrs. Thatcher left us. As she stooped to say goodbye to Ben, he threw his arms round her neck, and, kissing her, whispered something very softly. She looked dreadfully disturbed, but managed to preserve her composure, till she had left the room, when, her honest face working convulsively, she sobbed, "The darling little lad! He knows he's going!"

"Going? where?" I asked, almost gasping for terror.

"He knows he's dying. He whispered to me, 'God bless you, dear old granny! Perhaps you will never see me again in this world!'"

My brain reeled. I could not—would not believe it. In silence we drove on; and mechanically I said goodbye to Mrs. Thatcher, and saw the train bear her away.

CHAPTER XX.

AUTUMN glided into Winter, Winter into Spring; yet still Ben lay on the sofa, where our dear father used to be; and even we, accustomed as we were to look at him all day, saw that he grew thinner and thinner, weaker and weaker, daily. If he suffered, he did not complain. He bore all with a gentle patience, that was an essential part of his most sweet nature.

One day he asked to be wheeled to the window, to see the budding trees, and the birds flying amongst them. The sun was getting low, and its soft light fell upon his white face and golden hair, and little thin transparent hands, making him look too ethereal, too like a being of the spirit land. Something of what I felt, must have appeared in my face, for he said, with a smile, "I shall be as bright and happy as those birds, and safe, dear, safe from pain and sorrow, and with death *behind* me—think of that!"

"Oh Ben, darling—darling!" I moaned.

"I want you to see it as I do, Winnie dear," he pleaded, in sweet, faint tones. "I shall be so happy—so full of life. If, only, you were going with me! But that will follow."

"Oh Ben! Ben!" I sobbed, "I can't bear it! I can't!"

"Yes, you can, dear. I should not have been happy here when I grew up. I have had a very, very happy life with you, but I have suffered so much, at times."

"When, darling?"

"I have fretted about things."

"What things, dear?"

"All sad things. I fretted so, when poor Betsey Lake died, that I could not sleep for nights. I couldn't bear to know, if one of the calves was to be killed. I fretted when the kittens had to be drowned, or anything was killed. I grieved ever since Father died, till I knew I was going to him."

"Poor dear Ben!"

"I have fretted at the thought of leaving you; but now, I am beginning to see the reason of that, and I am getting happy about it."

"'The *reason*,' Ben?"

"Yes, dear. It would not be right for you to live only for

me. I should not have been a happy man, and you would have troubled about me. Some day, when I am gone, you will marry."

"Never! Never!" I cried. It seemed too dreadful, to speak of marriage at such a moment.

"I don't mean Harold," he continued; "he would not make you happy, poor fellow! He would not suit you."

"No one would suit me, Ben. When you are gone, I shall lie down and die."

"Winnie——."

"Yes, darling."

"I shall not be gone—I shall be near you—about you, in my beautiful spiritual body. The only difference will be, that you will not see me. I will come to you in dreams, if I am allowed."

I was silent. He went on.

"I have thought differently about death, since Dr. Gillias read that story of the two souls. I have read very much about it, since then, in the Bible, and I now think it so much easier to understand all that St. Paul and others say about the next state. It used to puzzle me so—all that about the natural body and the spiritual body, and the grain of wheat, and—oh, ever so much more. I feel that it *must* be so; that when my breath escapes, my spiritual body, which I am now in, but which your present eyes cannot see, will bound forth, *free*, just as a seed bursts out of the husk which has imprisoned it. This body, which you can see and touch,—this poor ugly old husk, will then be done with. It will have served its time, and will then come to an end, like the husk of the seed."

"Ah Ben? but I can't bear to think of its perishing!"

"Till you can, darling, you won't feel as happy as I do, at thought of its being put into the grave, and having earth piled upon it. I used to think it so dreadful, till I felt that the body laid there will not be *me*—I shall be *above it*, away from it. It will no more be *me*, than the old husk of the corn is part of the seed. Don't you see, dear?"

I did indeed begin to feel a little less desolate, a little less horror-stricken at the thought of Ben's being put into the grave. He went on, and I listened eagerly.

"When my old worthless body is lying here, you must not come and weep over it, darling; that would be foolish! You

would not be weeping over *me;* think of that! And when the old husk is put away under the earth, you must not come there to visit the grave, as if *I* were in it. That would be a dreadful thought, my Winnie!"

"Talk to me more about this, Ben. It makes me feel that death is less horrible, and the grave a different thing altogether."

"Suppose I had had my arm or my leg cut off, and it had been buried in the earth, you would not have come to visit the mound, and weep over it, though the arm and the leg had once been a part of *me*—would you Winnie?"

"No Ben; I should feel that you were not there."

"Then, Winnie dear, why can't you feel, that when my death-body gives way, and leaves my life-body free, *I* am not dead? The *me* that you love, is my spirit, my soul, all that *thinks* and *feels*, isn't it, Winnie?"

"Yes darling—go on; you comfort me."

"Then don't you think it would be wrong to visit my grave, as if *I*—your Ben—lay there, in that horrible state?"

"Yes Ben, I see it now. Go on."

"And the more you feel this, the more you will feel that I am not dead."

"Yes, love; but the parting!"

"Yes, that will be sad, my Winnie." His dear face worked painfully; then with an effort, he said, "But it will be only the same as if I had gone to a distant land for a while. You could not see me or talk to me, though you would know I lived."

"But we could write to each other Ben, and know that each was well and happy."

"Not always, dear; one or the other might be either ill or unhappy. Set against the writing, the blessed feeling of knowing that I am always well and happy in my new home."

"How you have learnt to talk and think, since you have been ill, my darling!"

"Yes Winnie. I am always thinking now. It is so comforting."

Thus he talked to me day after day, till my desperate grief at the thought of what was to come, became less; my strength to bear God's will, was greater. Moreover, I was learning, more, and more, to see the reason of things, and to feel in my

inmost heart, that "all things work together for good." I was speaking of this to Ben one day. He smiled, and said,—

"I saw it long ago, Winnie. Look at our running away from home. I used then to think you perfect, but I now see that if you had grown up to be a woman, with the faults you had when a child, it would have been very, very sad."

"Yes, Ben; I should have made so many people unhappy, and I should have been so unhappy myself. And Ben, though we had some pleasure, we had a great deal of trouble. Those dreadful scenes at the "Swan," taught me so much! Then, your fall into the sea, gave me a shock, taught me a great deal, made me very thoughtful. And oh! your illness! That changed me indeed!"

"Poor Winnie!"

"But I think all those trials were not sent to me *only* to check me and show me how wickedly I had acted; they were meant to try my fortitude, and teach me self-control. Without self-control, how could I have persevered in trying to conquer my faults? And that made our dear father so happy before he died."

"Yes, Winnie; and even your going to visit the Pinchleys, was good for you. It strengthened your self-control, and helped you to keep down your feelings during dear Father's illness, so as not to disturb him."

"Oh Ben, my darling, I see it is all well! But this parting—"

"The parting is not so bad as it would have been if I had died at Prestford; is it, Winnie?"

"Oh no—" I shuddered. "That would have been unbearable!"

Thus from day to day we talked, Ben each day growing weaker, till we knew the time we dreaded was close at hand. He could not be carried down stairs now; he could not even bear to be dressed and laid on his own little sofa. He was in bed, propped up with pillows, and his breath was very quick and short, and his voice very faint, but his smile sweeter than ever. Little did he speak now. He lay so still and quiet, that save for his cough, and for the faint movement of his breathing, we sometimes fancied his spirit was freed; yet still more days went on, and he lived.

He had made me promise to struggle against my grief; not to think of him as *dead*, or even away; not to go to his

grave, or to fancy he was there; but to think of him as very near, close to me and about me, in the very body he had worn upon earth, only, *freed from the husk.* When I had given him this promise, and he saw that I began to feel and believe as he did, a sweet calm fell upon his spirit, and he was in a state of happy waiting for the end.

It came at last—the end, for us, the beginning, for him. He had been silent for a long time. His cough had ceased, and all the pain had left him. His eyes were up-turned for a while; then, they quietly moved downwards, as though following something. His gaze rested, full, between my mother and me. He spoke.

"Papa, I am ready."

"Do you see Papa, Ben?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Is he here, between Mamma and me?"

"Yes. *Your* eyes can't see him. *I* see him—more and more plainly, every minute."

Then he seemed to listen to some-one speaking, and, as if in reply, said,

"Yes papa, I am coming—I am quite ready now."

His voice had sunk low, and came in little gasps; but the words were clear and plain, and he said, his eyes still fixed upon what he saw,

"Winnie, it is true——."

"What, darling?"

"The—body——."

He seemed anxious to say something. I tried to help him.

"The spiritual body, my darling?"

"Yes—better than this—much, much better."

He lay so still, that we did not move, to disturb him; and so, the thread snapped quietly and painlessly, at what moment we knew not; and my brother's soul was free.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE house was very quiet, as though one of its members had gone on a journey. There was the feeling of missing the departed one, of not being able to realize that he *was* gone; but there was no violent grief; only a stillness, a hush, a missing of, and a longing for, something that ought to have been there.

Harold had of course been sent for. To an outside observer, it would have appeared that he was the one who had suffered the loss, rather than we. He looked utterly wretched; so much so, that we could not understand it, till he told me the reason one day, when we were alone.

"Something is heavy on my mind, Winnie; and I must tell it to you, though I know it will make you hate me," he began.

"I don't think anything could make me hate you, Harold," I replied.

"Will you *promise* not to hate me—not to cast me off?" he pleaded.

"Indeed, I will," I answered.

"No matter what it may be?" he persisted.

"Yes, I think I may promise," I said.

"Oh, Cousin Winnie—dear Cousin Winnie—my heart aches so!"

"Poor Harold!"

"I would lay down my life—but that is nothing!—I would be tortured to death, if I could bring the dear lad back again!"

"He is better where he is, Harold. But what is it troubles you so?"

"Winnie, when I first came here, I had heard of your father's death; and my mother told me that Ben was said to be very weakly; so I came here, to see for myself, whether I had a chance of stepping into his shoes. I came here, hoping that Ben would die!"

"Oh Harold!"

"Yes, you shrink from me—I knew you would! I knew you would hate me!"

"No, Harold—no. You did not know our darling, then. You did not know how dear he was to us all."

"No indeed, Winnie. I hadn't been in the room with him and you for five minutes, before I repented; and I prayed in my heart, that I might never be heir to this place. I would have died for him—indeed I would!"

"I believe you, Harold—poor Harold. Now you must not grieve about it any more. The best of us do wrong, at times."

"Then you don't hate me, Winnie?"

"Indeed I do not. Be comforted, dear Harold. All things have happened just in the best way, and at the best time."

"Oh Winnie, how can you think so?" How *can* it be for the best, that you have lost your father, and your dear Ben?"

"Ben was not fitted for life. His body would always have been a source of suffering to him; his mind, still more so. It was better he should go to the world he was fitted for."

"But your father?"

"My dear father so idolized Ben, that to exist without him, would have been one long, weary pain. When my father died, I could not see the *reason* of things. I do now. My father was taken first, to save him from much suffering. Ben was spared so long, I think, partly on our father's account, partly——."

I paused.

"Yes?" said Harold,

"Partly, that he might do me good."

"Do *you* good? Oh Winnie!" exclaimed Harold, in wonder. Poor fellow! he thought me perfect!

"Yes, Harold. If Ben had died sooner, he would not have made me *see into* another life, as I do now. This *seeing into*, is my great—my inexpressible comfort."

"Tell me—I don't understand——."

"I believe that he is living somewhere—perhaps not far off; looking, and feeling, and thinking, and speaking, just as he did when he was here."

"Oh cousin! that is not what the Bible tells us!"

"Are you sure of that, Harold?"

"Well, I don't pretend to be a religious fellow, you know; but I always go to church on Sunday, and sometimes—especially since I have known you, my dear, I have taken a spell at the Bible; but it says nothing that I can see, about people being the same in Heaven that they are here."

"Come now, Harold. Do you remember the story about Dives and Lazarus?"

"Oh yes; a rich fellow, who died and went to Hell; and a beggar, who died and went to Heaven. By the bye, it isn't said what the rich man had done, to be sent to Hell, or the poor one, to be sent to Heaven."

"The Bible does not always tell us everything, Harold; it leaves us a good deal to find out. We have to compare one part with another, and draw the right conclusion. For instance, we are told that all selfish, worldly, hard-hearted people, will be unhappy in the next state; and all the good, kindly people will be happy. Depend upon it, Dives was a selfish, hard-hearted man, and Lazarus a good uncomplaining creature, who bore his cross patiently here, and got his reward there. But I cited this story, as one instance that people *look* the same, and *are* the same, in the next state, that they are here."

"How? Why?" asked poor perplexed Harold.

"Is it not said, that Lazarus, from his place, saw and *knew* Dives from afar? By the way, that seeing from 'afar' is one of the many proofs that our senses, when there, will be immensely superior to what they are here. That 'far' must have been an enormous distance; infinitely farther than the finest telescope known, could carry human vision."

"Yes, cousin; that *is* wonderful."

"Well Harold, Lazarus knew Dives, and Dives knew Lazarus, in the next state. Would they have known each other, if their appearance had changed?"

"Of course not, Winnie?"

"Then, they remembered all that happened on earth. Dives remembered that, while on earth, he had received 'good things,' and Lazarus remembered that he had received 'evil things.' Therefore, with memory, recognition, and speech, they were just the same persons they had been on earth."

"Wonderful! But I thought all people who went to Heaven wore white robes, and had palms in their hands, and sang hymns always."

"A great deal of that is not to be taken literally, Harold. It is mere imagery, intended to express purity, praise, etc."

"There is a lot about it in Revelations."

"Yes; and we must not take all that, literally, neither must we confound *saints* with *angels*. That there is a class of intelligences who have never lived on earth, we must believe; but of what they are, we know little. People are too apt to

say of a departed friend, 'He is an angel in Heaven;' but he is not, and, I think, never could be, an angel."

"I see, now, why you don't fret more about Ben. I thought you would have gone mad when he died, and have sat all day and night upon his grave."

"I might have gone mad with grief if I had thought Ben had passed into another form, in which I should never know him again, even if I followed him to the next world. I might have wept my heart out, upon his grave, if I had believed, that the body, in which he thought, and spoke, and smiled, and wept, on earth, was there, under the ground, and going fast to corruption. But it is not so; his real body, more closely allied to his spirit (which was what I loved), is with him still."

"How have you found out all this, cousin?"

"Only through reading the Bible, Harold."

"Why didn't *I* find it out in reading the Bible?"

"Perhaps you only read it mechanically, Harold, as I used to, till Ben talked so much about the world to come. We *studied* the Bible together, and found so much in it that we had never suspected. Before that, when I came to anything in the Bible that I did not understand, I used to think, 'Ah the Bible is a mysterious book. We must not try to be too curious about its meaning. It is just meant to teach us our duty towards God and our fellow creatures. We have no business to try and find out more than God tells us plainly;' and so on——."

"Cousin, I fancy many people live and die, thinking just as you did."

"But what a pity, Harold! I am sure a great many people have a perfect horror of death, just because they feel *they* will be put under the earth, and that their individuality is extinguished by death. And a great many people grieve hopelessly over their departed relatives, because they think they will never know them again in the forms they loved."

Harold rose, and brought me a Bible. "Here, cousin—I can't find the places easily. Will you show me some of the texts that speak of this spiritual body?"

I turned to the 5th chapter of the 2nd Corinthians, and read, "'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' It says, not that we *shall* have, but that we *have*. Does not that mean,

that we have them, both, at the same time, on earth, and that when our flesh-body dies, our spirit-body lives still?"

"Then it goes on to say, 'For in this' (this body) 'we groan, earnestly desiring to be *clothed upon* with our house which is from heaven' (our spiritual body). Then (1st Corinthians, 15th chap.), it says that God gives 'to every seed his own body.' Again, 'There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial.' Again, 'It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.'"

"Does that mean, that we have at the same time upon earth, two bodies—one within the other, as it were—just like a nut within its shell, or a seed within its husk; and that when we die, the seed or the nut breaks out, full of life, while the husk or the shell perishes?"

"Yes, Harold; so I understand it."

Harold's eyes were glancing down the page with a puzzled expression. At last he said—

"Cousin, what does this mean? 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.'"

"As far as I can understand (but I admit that this part is very difficult to me) those five verses mean, simply, what so many other passages seem to denote; that, in dying, we give up, for ever, all that part of us which was mortal, and become altogether incorruptible and spiritual."

"But what about the 'last trump'? and the dead being raised?"

"I am still in difficulty about that. It may mean, that, at the last trump, they who are still upon the earth, therefore 'mortal,' or 'dead,' as perhaps it might be rendered, shall suddenly, without passing through death, cast off their mortal bodies, retaining only their spiritual bodies. Or, there may be some other meaning, which I am too earthly to understand."

"Cousin, if we cast off our bodies altogether at death, how was it, that when the disciples went to the sepulchre, they found not the *body* of the Lord Jesus?"

"That has perplexed me; but I think we can understand it thus. Christ did not ascend into Heaven directly he died. He remained on the earth for forty days after his resurrection from the grave. During that time, he was frequently visible to the disciples, walked, talked, even *ate earthly food*, which I suppose he could not have done in his earthly body."

"But when he was at last carried away out of their sight, he went away in his earthly body, did he not?"

"I think, that perhaps he bore his earthly body till the moment when he ascended. I cannot help thinking so, on reading the latter part of St. Luke's last chapter. He so evidently wished them to believe, that he was in his earthly body still. As it is said that, 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,' may it not be, that, at the moment of his ascension, his earthly body fell from him, leaving only his spiritual body?"

"But they would have seen it fall."

"That does not follow. Could not God do, in one moment of time, that which he generally takes years to do—resolve the earthly body into invisible gasses?"

"Yes; but oh, how strange it all seems!"

"Not half so strange, not half so difficult to believe, as that our released souls, after having been bodyless until 'the last day' (whatever that may be), should then, for no reason that I can conceive, rejoin their own bodies, which could only be effected by the falling to pieces of men and women, animals, plants, everything in short, into whose composition they had meanwhile entered."

"True," mused Harold; "and even then, there would not be the old 'individuality,'—do you call it, cousin?—because, since the body had belonged to me, it would have been part of ever so many other people and things. It would not be my old *I*. But then, how about receiving in the *body*, our reward or punishment for deeds done in the flesh?"

"Why not? supposing that body to be the spirit-body, which we love on earth in company with the earth-body."

"Oh, cousin, if the spirit-body could but speak, how it would beg and entreat to be freed from the earth-body, with its grossness and weakness."

"Perhaps that is the meaning of the words 'we groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.' And again, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'—which, I hear, should have been translated 'this body of death.'"

"Cousin, I feel as if I should never have time enough to think out all my thoughts about this. Did you and Ben often have these talks?"

"Often and often. It was, to him, as though he were a person, about to travel into an unknown country, who wanted to know all about the place he was going to."

This conversation made a great impression on Harold. He became very thoughtful, and quieter and gentler than we had known him. His thoughts appeared to take a higher tone; at least, so we judged by the tenor of his talk. But we did not see much more of Harold, for he left us about a week later. He was to be away two months, and then to take his place at the Elms, as its master. The poor, good fellow, had at first refused to accept his new position; but we had insisted upon it, assuring him that we could not bear to live on there, without Ben and my father, and representing that the dear old place would fall into decay without a master. So he reluctantly consented.

The day before he left, he was terribly depressed in spirits, and followed me about everywhere, as if he could not bear to be away from me for a moment. For the fiftieth time he said, "Do tell me something more, that I can do for you, dear cousin——."

"I think I have given you quite enough to think of, Harold," I replied.

"No, indeed, very little, dear," he said. "To take care of Pearl and Vixen, and Kittums, till you settle in your new home; and to see that Joe's sister is kept up to the mark; and to leave the garden just as it is, especially Ben's garden; and to——."

"Yes, dear Harold, you remember it all."

"Are you sure poor old nurse would rather go home to her daughter?" he asked.

"Quite sure. She can't bear to be here without Ben."

"And Miss Parsons?"

"She will join her mother and sister, and help in their school."

"I wish you would give me something more to do, though—Oh, Winnie—Winnie——," he wistfully began.

"What is it, dear Harold?" I asked.

"Dear Cousin Winnie, won't you give me the least hope, that *some* day——."

"No, indeed, Harold," I sadly replied; "I shall never marry."

He heaved a great sigh, and rejoined, "Don't trouble about

me, dear. Though you will never love me, I am glad I have known you. I am not the same fellow that I was before I knew you. I thought that every girl I met, was a flirt, and ready to jump into my arms. When I met you first, I expected you would be like the fast girls I have flirted with. But you, my dear, repelled my boldness of look and speech, and made me so ashamed of myself by your modest, quiet ways, that I could have fallen at your feet to pray you to forgive me. Oh Winnie, if girls only knew, how men worship a modest, pure-minded, gentle woman; how they despise a bold, fast, flirting girl (though they are ready to flirt with her, and talk against her with other men), they wouldn't think it a fine thing to be fast, and to talk slang!"

"*I* was very near becoming such a one, some years ago, Harold," I answered, deeply abased at the recollection, as I always was, even to that day.

"How was it that you didn't?" he asked.

Then I told him the history of my flight from home, and all that had followed; and of how my deep remorse and self-abasement, helped by my dear mother's untiring efforts, had saved me from becoming that most repulsive of creatures, a fast woman.

"Dear cousin," said Harold, "if there were more women like you and your mother, men would be better than they are. Women have such power over men. It is a glorious thing, when they use it rightly."

"It is an awful responsibility, Harold," I said.

"But *what* a privilege!" he exclaimed.

"I pray that I may never abuse it," I ejaculated.

That was the last serious talk I had with dear, good Harold, before his departure.

CHAPTER XXII.

WE wandered from country to country, from town to town, my sweet mother and I. Summer, Autumn, Winter, passed away, and Spring had come; yet still we did not think of returning home. Home? As yet we had none: perhaps that was the reason that we lingered yet.

We were not unhappy; only, a sadness had fallen upon us. To me, it seemed such a weary, weary time, since I had seen my Ben, and had heard his voice; and when, on some soft moonlight night, my mother was very quiet, and spoke in hushed tones, and, forgetting my presence for a moment, sighed heavily, I knew that she was thinking of my father. What a different life from that which she had hoped for! But we clung to each other all the more, now that we were alone in the world. For me, life's hopes had ended, and I was content that it should be so; but, oh! the yearning to hear the tones of a voice, that is stilled; to feel the touch of a hand, that is cold: to see the loving smile that is dimmed for ever, here!

Letters came often from Mr. Gascoign and Harold. How welcome they were! We heard that the new squire was very popular, joining heartily in field sports, accepting and returning hospitality, and active in every good work amongst the poor. This was indeed grateful news to me; for I loved my good cousin dearly, and had had many a heart-ache about him at first, fearing lest his ill-fated love for me should make him reckless and wild, as it had at first threatened to do. And when I had heard, how he was associating with the wildest young men in the place, whom my father would never admit into the house, drinking and carousing with them night after night, and playing off wild pranks, utterly beneath a man who valued his character, I wrote to him in great sorrow, told him how I hoped better things of him, and entreated him, if he cared for my affection and esteem, to remember that it was due to his name and position—to take no higher ground—that he should lead an upright, honourable life, and take the lead in the place, as an example of sobriety and morality. In reply, he had written a very sad, but peni-

tent letter, confessing that he had lowered himself shamefully, and promising amendment. He said,—

"But oh! my dear, I have been so miserable about you, that I have tried to drown thought in these disgraceful excesses. I know that is no excuse for me. Many a man who has set his heart on a girl, has had to give her up, and to see her marry some one else (which is not my case, dear); but he doesn't run wild and disgrace himself, nor will I do so again. Only trust me once more, and I will not disappoint you. I want to have your respect, even if I can't have your love. You have had so much trouble in your life, dear cousin. I have been a brute, to add to it, as you say I have done. But you shall yet be proud of me, and when you hear people speak well of me, you shall think that it is all your own doing, for indeed it is. I was a worthless scamp, till I met you. Oh, if girls would try and do good to men, instead of harm! The world would be so much better!"

Harold had kept his word from that time; and it seemed to me, that I had not met him altogether in vain, since I had been able to draw out the good, and to lessen the evil, in him.

Summer had come. We had settled down for awhile in a lovely little nest among the German mountains. We wandered about during the day, carrying our simple dinner with us; for we begrudged the time spent over it in the house. For hours together, we sketched, read, and worked, talking little, thinking much. It was a tranquil and not unhappy life, and we were so content with it, that we said we could almost determine to live there, if it were always summer. One morning, letters were brought to us, just as we were starting for the day as usual. We put them into our pockets, and said we would not read them till we had reached our camping ground. When we arrived at a sweet little valley, with a bubbling fountain springing up amongst rock, and feeding a bright streamlet that hurried on through grasses and ferns and stones, till it was out of sight, we sat down in the shade of the great trees, which made an impenetrable canopy overhead, and laid out our repast. But, before commencing, we examined our letters. Mamma's were from Aunt Jemima, Mr. Gascoign, and Dr. Gillias, from whom it was, by the way, that I had formerly heard such sad accounts of poor Harold. My letters were from Harold and Uncle Dick.

"Suppose we read them first?" I suggested. "Then we can talk about them while we have dinner."

So we opened our letters. Uncle Dick's was bright and funny, as usual; Harold's, quiet and thoughtful. The latter part contained the little news that Elmsleigh afforded. Then he spoke about the Elms, described what was doing in the garden, mentioned Pearl and Vixen, and Kittums, commended Joe's sister, and concluded his letter, as usual, with,

"Ever your loving cousin,

"HAROLD."

But then came a postcript, which made me start and cry out. Mamma looked up. At that moment, fortunately, a gnat had bitten me, so I laid it to that account. My mother said, "How pale you are, dear! It is strange that it should pain you so much. I hope it is a gnat, and not a mosquito."

I assured her, that it did not hurt me much, but that I had been startled. And so I had. The postscript ran thus:—

"I forgot to say, that I don't like Mr. Gascoign's wife at all. But I dare say you will hear all about her from the doctor, when he writes. He does not love her fondly!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

I WAS in a restless, nervous, irritable state, which made the repose of the little vale inexpressibly irksome to me. Two days after receiving my cousin's letter, I entreated my mother to start afresh on our wanderings. I said, I had a longing for towns, and should like again to visit the grand old Cathedrals, and once more to feast on works of art, for I was a little tired of nature.

"Winnie dear, I think your cousin's letter brought bad news. You have not shown it to me, but I can see that you have not been the same, since you received it."

"Don't ask me about it. *Pray* don't!" I pleaded.

"I hope Harold is not falling back," she persisted; in fact, I *know* he is not, for Dr. Gillias is so pleased with him and Gerald. By-the-bye, you have not read the doctor's letter. Here it is."

"No Mother, I won't read it," I replied.

"I don't know whether Gerald's letter would please you, or not, darling," she continued, fondly smoothing my hair; "but I am afraid not. Yet sometimes I have thought——."

"Then don't think any more," I impatiently replied. "I don't want to see any letters from home, nor to hear any news! I want to forget it altogether."

"Oh Winnie! Can you speak so, to *me!*"

I was conscience-stricken. I had spoken like the Winnie of old times, sharply, impetuously. The reaction came, and I fell upon her neck, weeping bitterly.

"Mother! Mother!" I sobbed, "forgive me. I am miserable, but I have no right to be so. I shall soon get over it; indeed I shall! Only, take me away from this lovely place. It makes me so unhappy!"

So we wandered again, from country to country, town to town, spending whole days together in old gloomy Cathedrals, listening to the grand roll of the organ, through endless naves, and under the deep arches. Or else, we passed the day in studying the wondrous works of the old masters, those giants in art. Anon, we visited gay cities, and entered upon light pleasures, and revelled in delicious music. By degrees I had

regained my old contented calm, and my mother began to lose the anxious look with which she had regarded me; and again, when Summer came, I remembered the sweet little vale among the mountains, and petitioned to return, to spend my twenty-first birthday there. So we wended our way slowly back, through the towns we had already visited, lingering amongst the old Cathedrals, and in the picture galleries; finding everything very beautiful, and, like all that is most beautiful, very sad; till we at last reached the little German valley. And so calm, so pure, so lovely in its perfect repose, did we think it, that we said we could almost find in our hearts to live and die there.

I heard, afterwards, that we were objects of great interest to the simple peasants, who used to marvel greatly over what could induce two rich ladies to live in so humble a place, when they might, if they chose, live in a palace, perhaps in Dresden itself! Ah! but these poor ladies must have seen much trouble, they said, for the grand, great lady had such lovely silver streaks in her hair, and such a quiet, far-off look, for all she seemed so cheerful; and the beautiful young maiden was so white—so white, and her step so languid, and she never laughed. They thought that the poor young maiden had lost a lover in the wars, and that the grand, beautiful, tall lady had perhaps lost a husband or a son. They were so good, these simple people; they would bring us offerings of fruit and flowers, and eggs, and home-made cakes, and refused payment, only saying how proud they were if we would accept their gifts.

Two years had more than passed away since our Ben had left us; and still I felt an inexpressible yearning to see him again; and when I thought what a long life lay before me, I shrank from it. But one day, my dear mother was taken suddenly ill, and the only doctor we could get, and who had to be brought from a distance of five miles, pronounced her to be in danger. Then I saw how thankless I had been, to repine, so long as I had this treasure left; and, in bitter penitence, I prayed that my ingratitude might be forgiven, and my sweet mother spared to me. In agony, I watched beside her through the long, long night; and when, towards morning, she fell into a soft sleep, I felt as though heaven itself had opened before me. She recovered more rapidly than anyone expected; and in a few weeks we were again rambling forth

in the bright little valley; and the peasant folk noticed, that the young maiden smiled at last, and seemed happy, and that the tall, grand lady, with the sweet face, had lost her far-off look, and was not so sad.

In truth, my dear mother had been borne down by anxiety about me; and I now knew, for the first time, how my selfish sorrow had grieved her.

We sat down on the trunk of a tree; my hands clasped her arm, my eyes sought hers. I felt, I think for the first time, how very dearly I loved her; and I told her so.

"You are all I have to love now, sweet Mother," I murmured.

"Ah Winnie, my darling," she softly said, stooping down to kiss my upturned face, "life is before you, with many chances of happiness. *You* will form new ties, my child; but for me—*you* are my one thought—my one treasure."

"Dearest Mother, I am so happy in your love, that I wish for no other," I exclaimed.

"Is your trouble—whatever it was—over, my dear?"

"Yes, Mother; quite, quite over. I can never forget it; but it no longer makes me unhappy."

"You will not tell me, dear?"

"No, Mother, not now; it is too fresh. Perhaps, some day—many years hence—I may tell you, when I have heart to laugh at it. But no, that can never, never be!" I added, with quick pain.

"Time does so much, my child."

"Yes, dear Mother. But indeed, I don't need that time should do anything for me. So long as I have you, I am happy—*very* happy."

And so we talked, till it was time to go in for tea. We found letters awaiting us, or rather, my mother. One, bore a deep black border. A pang of terror shot through me, as I gasped,

"Not Mr. Gascoign! Oh, *he* is not dead?"

"This is from him, love," replied my mother, showing the envelope, in his handwriting.

I fell on her neck, and sobbed hysterically. She soothed me with gentle words and caresses, and said, that "after all I had gone through, the deep mourning envelope was enough to upset me," etc. By degrees I regained my composure, and she examined the other letter. "From your Aunt

Jemima, dear. Why surely—surely—." She hastily broke the seal, and read.

"My dear Helen,

"Gerald has promised to tell you of my great—my irreparable woe. I cannot write much, for my heart is too heavy. I have lost the best husband that ever lived. I was not worthy of him; but, with his old angelic goodness, he told me, at last, that I had done my best, according to my lights, though (and how true it is!) I was always a poor creature. Oh! to think that my sainted Anselm is now a bright and beautiful angel!—doubtless, one of those who wear crowns of gold, and are clad in garbs of spotless white, and sing glorious strains, with golden harps! It is *his* gain, for he was too bright and beautiful for this world; but *my* deep, irreparable loss. I can only pray, that I may one day be accounted worthy to meet him, in that better world, where—. I can write no more; my tears blind me.

"My best love to dear Winnie.

"Ever, your desolate and widowed friend,

"Jemima Pinchley."

Though we felt heartily for poor Aunt Jemima, we could not help smiling over her rather heterodox theology, and at the notion of the deceased Mr. Pinchley, in the character of an angel, in a golden crown (the combination of style was singular), singing to the accompaniment of a golden harp; he, who could no more sing than a crow. I felt for poor Aunt Jemima in her trouble, but could not help thinking, "What a blessing he is gone!" when I remembered how he had tyrannised over her, at the Chestnuts.

"I wonder what Gerald says," resumed my mother, opening his letter, and glancing through it.

"—Poor Pinchley—liver—no wonder, his temper was so bad—Jemima—great distress—do her good—distract her from her grief—I will bring her—long so to see you again—Winnie——."

Here my mother stopped abruptly.

"I don't want to hear that letter read, please, dear Mother," I interposed. "I don't want to hear any news at all."

"But I must tell you the upshot of it, my dear. Gerald

thinks Jemima ought to have a change; so she is coming here to us."

"Poor Aunt Jemima!" I said; "we must try to console her."

"Gerald will leave the parish under the care of the Curate, for a while, and will escort her here."

"Oh Mother, No! No!" I cried.

My mother gazed at me in amazement. "Winnie!" she ejaculated.

I recovered myself, and stammered, "Men are such a bore, Mamma. We are so much happier without them. We have been so comfortable without visitors."

"I daresay he will not stay long, my dear," answered my mother, with a pained look.

"Dearest Mother!" I cried, "if you wish it, make him stay as long as he can be spared."

"Oh, as for that, dear, the Curate is well up to the work. He could manage a much larger parish than that. And poor Gerald has never left it since we were there, except to go to the neighbouring towns, for a day, now and then. After two year's work, he ought to have a little holiday."

"He went away, however, for his wedding tour, Mother!"

"His wedding tour? What *do* you mean, Winnie?"

"I heard of his marriage, Mother. Harold told me."

I was exerting all the self-control I could muster, and it fortunately enabled me to go through the shock that awaited me, the next moment.

"His marriage! Harold told you!" my mother exclaimed, in unfeigned amazement. "Harold must have taken leave of his senses!"

Slowly, a dim notion of coming bliss, was dawning upon me. I waited for more.

"If Harold told you that Gerald was married, he told an inexcusable falsehood. My brother has not dreamt of marriage —except—," she checked herself, and said no more.

Was this the same world that I had been in, five short minutes ago? The cottage was a fairy palace! The walls were of crystal! Jewels decked the floor! I trod on air! My heart was too light! I longed to run out into the forest, where none were by, and to sing aloud all my song of thankfulness and praise. But I was very quiet, and tried to say, in an indifferent tone, "What an absurd mistake it has been," etc.

"When did Harold tell you this, my child?" asked my mother.

"In a letter that I received just before we left this place, last year," I replied.

"Tell me what he said, dear."

"He said, that he did not like Mr. Gascoign's wife, and he thought Dr. Gillias did not like her either, but that no doubt the doctor had told you all about it."

"Oh you silly child! That was his *cousin's* wife. The Kimberton Gascoigns were staying at the rectory at the time."

The scales fell from my eyes. How could I have forgotten Mr. Gascoign of Kimberton, who had given us such a terrible fright, the last day we were at the Crown and Anchor?

"You would not let me read the doctor's letter, my dear; or you would never have made such a mistake. I wanted also to tell you, what Gerald said in his letter that day; but you would not listen."

"I was very wilful, dear Mother; I will listen now, if you will tell me."

"No, dear; I think he would rather tell it himself."

We sat down to the quiet evening meal. Never was tea so fragrant; never was cream so sweet and rich, never was bread so white and fine. Yet I scarcely tasted anything; I longed to be out in the woods; and when we had finished tea, I brought my mother her warm shawl, and drew her out into the sweet summer night.

We walked slowly along a narrow path, overarched by trees, through which the moonbeams shimmered green, and cold, and shy. A tiny rivulet ran on, murmuring as it went. All the birds had gone to rest, except the nightingales, and they filled the soft moonlight with their most sweet melody. We walked along in silence. My heart was too full for words; but tears filled my eyes, and, brimming over, fell down my cheeks. I was overwhelmed by the dawning of a joy, so great, so unspeakable, that I hardly dared to believe in it. It was so wonderful—so unlooked for—so infinitely beyond aught that I had ever dreamt of. I was bewildered, dazed, my brain was unable to take in all the happiness that seemed opening out before me. Happiness—a future—for *me*?

We turned at last, and retraced our steps homeward.

Lights were gleaming in our windows, voices were within

the house. In another moment there was hand-clasping and embracing. It was like a dream.

"Your letters reached us to-day, only," said my mother, when the first greetings were over; "the post is very uncertain here. How strange it would have been, if you had arrived before your letters."

"I thought it would be better to stay the other side of the river to-night, and come on to you to-morrow morning," said Mr. Gascoign; "but Jemima would not wait."

"I so longed to see you again," said poor Aunt Jemima, piteously, and in the timid, deprecatory tone she had fallen into, since her marriage. I think Mr. Gascoign noticed it; for he said, "And as she has been the commander of this expedition, and I only the lieutenant, of course I had to obey orders."

"Very unwillingly, I dare say," said my mother, with a smile which belied her words.

"Very," responded Mr. Gascoign, in a remarkably dry tone of voice.

I was glad they did not notice me much; and while they talked, I had time to regain composure.

"Have you a room for me here? or is there an inn, or a lodging, or anything?" asked Aunt Jemima, in helpless tones.

"Of *course* there is a room!" I replied. "If there were not, you should have mine, Aunt."

"Is there room for me?" asked Mr. Gascoign.

"No, Gerald," my mother answered; "but there is a little inn close by. I know they will make you very comfortable there. But now, for supper. Winnie, will you see to it, while I take your aunt to her room? There is a spare bedroom, Jemima; but, as you came directly after your letter, it is not so splendid as it should have been; but we will arrange it nicely to-morrow, if you will excuse it for this one night."

"I am sure it will be very comfortable," said Aunt Jemima, with a sigh of weary content. "Oh, how nice, to be here with you again!"

She and Mamma left the room together, and I was alone with Mr. Gascoign, and felt exceedingly nervous; but I called our little servant, and went in and out of the room, arranging the best little supper I could manage, on such an emergency; and presently, my mother's reappearance with Aunt Jemima relieved me from my foolish embarrassment.

After supper, we all accompanied Mr. Gascoign to the inn; he and my mother walking on before, Aunt Jemima following with me. Of course she talked of nothing but her "bereavement,"—as she considered it; it was as yet too early to feel it a relief. She dwelt much upon the merits of her departed Pinchley, extolling his "noble, elevated character, so free from human weakness," (which I had always set down to coldness of heart,) and the "high standard of his ideas, which she had despaired of even approaching" (which I had imputed to selfish egotism). But as poor Aunt Jemima did not wait for answers, I let her talk on, as it seemed to relieve her.

On arriving at the inn, we had to wake up the people, who had gone to bed. They were not at all put out, however; but only too glad to receive any friend of the "two great and distinguished ladies. Of course, the fine, tall handsome gentleman, was a Lord, and so like the Lady Travers, except that he had not those lovely trouble-streaks in his hair."

CHAPTER XXIV.

OH! the bright, beautiful day that followed! How the birds carolled, waking me with their singing! How the sun came dancing in, through my vine-covered window; dancing, leaping, quivering in bright flickers on the floor, gilding the drooping vine leaves, saying to me, as plainly as it could, "Be glad! Be glad!" I opened my window, wide, and, leaning out, drank in the fresh, sweet, morning air. "Life! Life!" I whispered, "what a happy thing it is, to live, to be young, to have years of this bright beautiful life before us!" Then I knelt down, and thanked God for having given me this blessed life, and for having added to it, youth and strength, and fair looks, so as to make me pleasant and lovely in the sight of those I cared to please. And I thanked Him, for having ordered all things as He had done, and begged forgiveness for all my thankless murmurings in the past.

Thus the time went, in happy musing, till I heard the others stirring, when I dressed, and then went down to prepare breakfast. Mamma soon followed, with Aunt Jemima. The latter, seen by daylight, showed painfully, that she had gone through a terrible amount of suffering and weariness. Mr. Gascoign afterwards told us, that Dr. Gillias had been sent for, when Mr. Pinchley was dying, and that he had said, Mr. Pinchley's naturally evil temper, had been a hundredfold worse, and that if he had not died, Aunt Jemima would either have done so, or have gone out of her mind. It was impossible to please him, do what she might; and he grew more and more irritable, till within three or four hours of his death, when his failing strength left him no more power to tyrannize. Then he had said those few words, which had been Aunt Jemima's poor little comfort ever since; a little disparaging praise, but wonderful for him. And so he had died. What a blessing it is, that we do not all see alike!

As Mr. Gascoign did not make his appearance, Mamma sent our little maid to the inn, to say that breakfast was ready; and in he came, a few minutes later, talking with Gretchen, by the way, in ringing cheery tones, that reminded me strangely and sweetly of the old days at the Elms.

"I did not understand I was to 'meal' here, as our American friends would say."

"Of course, Gerald, if you think our very simple ménage good enough for your fastidious taste."

"I hope so; unless you 'meal' on saur kraut, which I never *could* 'abide.'"

"Is not saur kraut, a preparation of cabbage?" asked poor Aunt Jemima, with a perceptibly timid glance at a covered dish before me. Poor soul! how could she ever forget the "Colecannon" at the Chestnuts, and various other vegetarian repasts, supplied by those never-failing rows of "kraut," which, Briareus-like, had seemed to multiplied the more, if you tried to destroy them.

"No, Aunt," I said; "eggs and ham. We don't much like cabbage."

An expression of relief shone over Aunt Jemima's poor pinched face, as I helped her to the dish before me.

After breakfast, we strolled forth to our favourite haunt. I was glad that Mamma led the way thither, and made us all sit down in our camping ground, where, twelve months ago I had opened that letter from my Cousin Harold. Till now, I had always associated the spot with somewhat of pain; but this morning cured me of that feeling for ever.

That happy, happy day, and the days that followed! The bright, dewy mornings, passed, in climbing to the heights, whence we looked upon mountain beyond mountain, till we could see no further. The sultry noontide, spent in the deep shade of the dark woods, with the grand sound of the wind among the big forest trees overhead; and of cataracts, and rushing streams everywhere; and, through all, the wonderful songs of the birds, filling the air. But, most sweet, most tranquil and comforting, were the still, cool evenings, when dusk began to gather all around, and the singing of the birds grew fainter and fainter, till it ceased, save that the nightingales took up the song, and steeped the soft moonlight in their witching melody.

Every night, we all went with Mr. Gascoign to the inn; he and mamma walking together, Aunt Jemima and I behind them. But, one night, Mamma and my aunt walked together, and went on, while Mr. Gascoign remained by my side. Mamma said that the night was so lovely, we would turn out of the way a little, and go through the wood. It was the

softest, most exquisite night of all the summer, and just enough moonlight shimmered through the trees, to light us on our way, though the glow-worms might almost have done that, it seemed to me.

And so it fell, that, walking slowly on, side by side, the words were spoken, that made me feel so happy and so honoured; and he asked me to be his wife.

I hardly knew what I said in reply, for my heart beat fast, and I felt faint and giddy; but he has told me, since, that, in answer to his strangely timid appeal, I had said, it was "too much happiness!"

Then he drew my hand within his arm, close—very close, and we walked on in silence, till we joined the others. I was about to withdraw my hand; but he held it tight, and said to my mother, "Helen, thank you—bless you—for telling me to 'try.' I *have* tried, and have succeeded!"

And then, in the presence of my mother and Aunt Jemima, he bent down, and kissed my cheek.

And thus I became Mr. Gascoign's affianced wife.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE talks that we had, and the explanations that we went through! At first, I could not realize the wonderful, the astounding fact, that Mr. Gascoign loved me—*me*, poor wayward, headstrong, Winnie; that he had loved me for years!—that he had more than once been on the point of saying what he had said now!—that he had positively been unhappy about me! Not until I had put, and he had answered, most crucial questions, did I finally render in my adhesion to that above-mentioned amazing truth.

"*May* I ask you some questions?" I had asked.

"As many as you like," he had replied.

"When did you *first of all* begin to—to like me?"

"That is the wrong term to apply. Be accurate, darling."

"Well, then, you know what I mean. Answer, please; I want to know."

"I can't remember the exact time, when I did *not* love you."

"Well, but I was a child, for years after you were a man."

"That is impertinent! But I forgive you! I think my *love* for you, began after your stupid little escapade. You went through such a determined course of self-denial—such 'perseverance in well-doing,' that you won my unqualified esteem and respect."

"To think of that! And I thought you so disliked me! It made me so unhappy!"

"Darling! If I had known! Well—I have a great love of the beautiful. That could not fail to make an impression on me. But I saw a dawning beauty in your soul, my dear, that was better than your mere outward beauty; for I knew *that* would last for ever."

"Why did you not ask me, then?"

"I thought it would be useless. I thought myself too old, too homely ——."

"Oh! *what* an idea!"

"— I thought you regarded me merely as a sober, good sort of old creature—a sort of clerical 'bumble-bee,' not fitted for a bright child like yourself; and when your father told me about Harold, I thought a marriage with him would be more suitable altogether."

"Then you gave me up? A shame!"

"No, I couldn't, altogether. When you had to go to the Pinchleys, I almost resolved to try; but I feared you would refuse me, and that our old happy relations would be destroyed. On the way there, I very nearly spoke to you."

"Oh, how I wish you had! What trouble it would have saved me!"

"And me, too. Your father's illness followed. I could not speak to you then—it would have been unfair. Then your father talked much to me about Harold, and the probability of your marrying. I knew not what course to take. While I hesitated, your father died."

"But after?"

"Harold's coming spoilt all. I thought you loved him."

"Oh! how could you?"

"I saw him kiss you."

"Yes, and if you had known why I allowed it, and that I had just refused to marry him, you would have commended me."

"I doubt that, *very* much!"

"I will tell you all about it, some day."

"You need not; Harold told me all about it long ago—when my cousin and his wife were staying with me. Harold said you had never loved him, and never would, and that he had sometimes fancied you liked *me*. I dared not hope so much; but I wrote to your mother (you were here then), telling her what Harold said, making a full confession of my own feelings, and asking her to sound you. Her answer was such, as to make me give up all hope of your ever loving me.

"Then why did you come here at last, and ask me?"

"Your mother now and then wrote, that ever and anon she had a faint idea you liked me better that you had ever liked anyone else, and she always said, 'Come, and try.' When Pinchley died, your poor Aunt so longed to be with you again, that Gillias suggested I should give myself a little treat, and escort Jemima. Now, are you satisfied, ma'am?"

"Yes."

"Then, now for my questions! Why did you express such a violent aversion to reading my letters, or *any* letters that might refer to me? Why did you hate the very sound of my name? Come, little one! Answer me that, if you can!"

He stood before me, and held me firmly by the shoulders,

preventing my escape; so I answered, "Because I thought you were married!"

"Oh! I see!"

"Now, do you want to ask any more questions?"

"One. Will you give me a decided answer?"

"Yes."

"My question is this. When shall we be married? No shuffling, now! You promised to give me a decided answer!"

"I did not expect *that* question!"

"If you don't answer it, I won't marry you at all!"

"How soon do you want me to marry you?"

"Next week."

"Nonsense! Ridiculous!"

"Why?"

"All sorts of things have to be done, before people marry—"

"What things?"

"The trousseau——."

"Stop! I have made a vow, never to marry anyone who provides a trousseau! So, *that* is disposed of. Now; for the other things."

I made no answer.

"Come darling, be reasonable. Your mother and I have settled it all between us; and our plans only need your consent."

"What are they?"

"Though Jacobs is doing duty for me now, I don't feel comfortable, at the idea of leaving my poor people very long with only him. If he were ill, all would go wrong."

"Oh! you don't want me to go back to Elmsleigh directly, I do hope!" I exclaimed. "I did so wish we could stay here in this beautiful Germany, for a little while after——."

"After we are married? Yes my darling; and so I wish too. Now, if your mother and Aunt Jemima go back to the Rectory, all will be well, They will help Jacobs."

"I am so glad to stay here, with—with you," I whispered.

"Then it is settled?"

"Yes, if Mamma really wishes it."

And thus it came to pass, that, the following week, we went to Dresden; and there, I became his wife. That evening, we stood on the platform of the railway station. A train was moving off; a sweet, noble, woman's face was looking from the carriage; and then the train disappeared, and I was alone with my husband.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OF the soft, holy, happy time that followed, what words could tell? No cloud of misunderstanding or unhappiness, ruffled the calm tenor of our lives. We loved and trusted, honoured, and esteemed each other. And thus the months passed away, till it was a year since our wedding day. My husband had constantly said, "We *must* go home, darling! we really *must!*" And as often had I pleaded, "*One* month more! only *one* month!" And time sped away; and a new joy was added to the cup that already brimmed over, when a little cherub was laid in my arms, on a snow white bed, in a pretty German town, and I felt that a fresh capacity for loving, and being happy, awoke within me at that moment.

Two more months elapsed; and then came tidings most sad, most piteous. My dear, good cousin, Harold, had met his death in the hunting field! My mother wrote us the dreadful tidings, and told us, also, that he had died instantaneously. "But," she added, "if anyone was ever prepared for a sudden death, our Harold was. I have never met a nobler soul—a more perfect Christian. I saw much of him, and he always imputed his amendment, to Winnie's good influence. Think of that, dear Winnie, and be comforted. You *must* come back now, to go through the necessary legal forms; for little Ben is now the 'Squire.'"

It was indeed strange, to think of it! that our little Ben should be the "Squire," and that we should live at the Elms, once more! But so it was. We returned to the dear old "Elms;" and our mother came to live with us, for we could not rest till she did so. In process of time, God gave us a little daughter, whom I would have called "Helen," after my dear mother, but my husband insisted on its being named Winifred. I objected, and the contention ran high, till a compromise was effected, and the little one was christened, Helen Winifred, just as our darling boy had been named Gerald Benjamin. So all were satisfied.

Poor old nurse no sooner heard that a little Ben was at the Elms, "Miss Winnie's baby," than she returned, unasked,

and insisted on being nurse, whether we liked it or not. And didn't she spoil those two children? And whenever I corrected them, didn't they run off to appeal to "Nursey dear?" One day, the poor old soul had a "stroke." Since then, her mind had been failing, and her memory made a strange jumble of times and persons. Once, after attentively observing the two children with a very puzzled look, she said, "Ah Miss Winnie, Ma'am," (so she always addressed me) "I can't make it out, how little Ben has grown taller than Miss Winnie. He used to be shorter by a good head." Dr. Gillias warned us that she was failing, and would not live much longer; and one morning, she was found dead in her bed, with a pleasant, calm expression on her face, as though she had passed away in her sleep.

Poor little Ben was sadly put out, at not having "dear nursey," as usual; but we had often told him, that some day nurse would have to go away, to be cured of all her aches and pains; and when she died, we told him she was gone, and was much better. For a little while, he kept asking for his "nursey," but we told him she had no more pains in the nice place she had gone to, and he would not see her for a long time. And so, by degrees, he grew accustomed to her loss.

Aunt Jemima settled at the Rectory; and who should settle there too, but Uncle Dick, who said he was getting old, and wanted to be with his own people, and that "he and sister Jemima would keep house together." Which they did, and very happy they were; and Aunt Jemima, true to herself, studied her brother's comforts from morning till night, and would have made herself a perfect slave to him if he had allowed it; but that was far from Uncle Dick's chivalrous nature. No courtier could have waited upon her with more anxious attention; no loving, gentle woman, could have more thoroughly studied her comfort and happiness. And Aunt Jemima managed well, and gave dinner parties after Uncle Dick's own heart, and sat at the head of his table with such grace, that he said "he admired her more than any woman in the world, and if she had not been his own sister, he would have asked her to be Mrs. Richard Travers." So, by degrees, the pinched, worried expression left poor Aunt Jemima's face; she gradually ceased to speak of "that angel man;" and we should have thought she had almost lived down her memory

of the Chestnuts, but for her shuddering horror at the sight of certain vegetables in the kitchen garden; a dislike, which clung to her for the rest of her life.

* * * * * *

I am going to show you a picture, if you will.

Three persons are seated on a rustic bench in the garden, one Summer evening.

A woman, most sweet and gracious, tall, fair, with eyes such as we think the angels have, and a smile that gives us a foretaste of Heaven; whose silver-streaked hair, and gently drooping mouth, tell of suffering and sorrow, whose grand, calm face, speaks of suffering bravely borne, and sorrow overcome.

A man, in the prime of life, of a very noble presence, with a brow, that bespeaks integrity, with a mouth, that tells of firmness, and a tender mobility of feature, that promises a world of sympathy and kindness for those who need it.

A younger woman—almost a girl, whose eyes beam with quiet happiness, as they seek her husband's loving glance, or wander away to two bright infant forms, flitting hither and thither among the flowers. The boy has sunny hair, a silvery voicé, a cherub's face. In the girl, is less of Heaven and more of earth; but her face is sweet and loving too.

And these two little ones are Winnie and Ben.

My tale is told.

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